

**INVESTIGATING POPULAR WRITING:
THE THEORY AND THE PRACTICE**

by

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in Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to illustrate and analyse the theory and the practice of popular writing in South Africa. Within this study popular writing is seen as an example of innovative educational practice, attempting to establish creative alternatives to traditional, hierarchical knowledge-production.

This subject has been chosen for investigation as it is seen as an important integral part of an alternative educational focus, which has come about due to oppositional "popular" pressure questioning and challenging hegemonic control of educational structures.

The first part of the dissertation constitutes an analysis of the theoretical debate characterising popular writing in South Africa. It attempts to highlight the problems and tensions inherent in the defined purpose of popular writing, as well as investigate the realisable potential of that purpose.

The second part of the dissertation focusses on the practice of popular writing. The **INTERNATIONAL LABOUR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION GROUP** has been chosen as an illuminative case study of popular writing practice. An attempt is made within this section at a fusion between theory and practice evidencing both tensions and points of agreement.

The conclusion highlights the problematic nature of this research as it essentially focusses on "work-in-progress" and therefore constitutes too static a framework for realistic, up-to-date analysis. The need for further research is emphasised, focussing especially on the most important and most complex element in popular writing: the readership.

QUESTIONS OF A WORKER READING HISTORY

Who built seven-gated Thebes?
 Books list the names of kings.
 Did kings haul the blocks and bricks?
 And Babylon, destroyed so many times
 Who built her up so many times? Where
 Are the houses where the construction-workers
 Of golden-gleaming Lima lived?
 Where did the masons go at nightfall
 When they finished mortaring the Wall of China?
 High Rome is full of victory arches.
 Who put them up? Whom did the Caesars
 triumph over?

Did chronicled Byzantium build only palaces
 for its inhabitants? In fabulous Atlantis
 the drowned bellowed in the night when the sea
 swallowed them up after their slaves.

Young Alexander conquered India
 Just he?
 Caesar beat the Gauls.
 Didn't he at least have a cook with him?
 Philip of Spain wept when his Armada
 Went down. Did no one else?
 Frederick the Great won out in the Seven Years War.

Who won besides?

A victory on every page.
 Who cooked the victory feast?
 A great man every decade.
 Who paid the bills?

Lots of facts.

Lots of questions.

Bertolt Brecht

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The Outline and Motivation	1
1.2 The Method and the Data of the Study	6
1.3 The Structure	8
1.4 Defining the problematic terms	10
1.5 The central research problems	11
CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL DEBATE: POPULAR WRITING IN SOUTH AFRICA	14
2.1 The Purpose of Popular Writing	14
2.2 The Producers of Popular Writing	25
2.3 The Definition and the Role of the Readership	36
2.4 Concluding the theoretical debate: Highlighting the tensions and problems	45
CHAPTER THREE: THE CASE STUDY: THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION GROUP (Ilrig)	50
Introduction	50
3.1 Ilrig - an overview	52
3.2 Ilrig's popular writing production - an analysis	66
3.2.1 The purpose	66
3.2.2 The Ilrig-producers	70
3.2.3 The nature and role of the Ilrig-readership	78

3.3 Ilrig: the Practice - a brief look at Ilrig's book-production	89
3.3.1 General observations	89
3.3.2 Two examples of Ilrig's book-production	93
3.3.3 Investigating concrete reader-feedback	107
3.3.4 State response: the Publications Control Board	112
3.4. Concluding the casestudy: Ilrig-practice as process	113
CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION: THEORY AND PRACTICE -THE POSSIBILITIES	118
Notes and References	123
Bibliography	128

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE OUTLINE AND MOTIVATION

The central focus of this dissertation is the concept "popular writing". The theoretical debate, as well as the practical possibilities characterising this concept, are to be investigated within the South African context.

The concept "popular writing" has emerged as a description of educational production which aims at "popularising" and "democratising" knowledge and culture. In order to gain a clearer understanding of these vague and problematic terms, it is necessary, albeit briefly, to place popular writing-developments into their historical context.

Popular writing activity in South Africa is rooted both in the tradition of radical historiography and in "writing from below" (forms of cultural production, which have in recent years gained prominence world-wide). It is also rooted in recent political and social developments in South Africa: the resurgence of the independent and non-racial trade unions since the early 1970's, and the stimulated interest amongst certain intellectuals in worker education and labour history¹.

Similarly, the upsurge in organised community resistance, particularly in the 1980's, accentuated that thorough research was needed on issues such as employment, health, education, housing etc. to make vital information accessible to "community-members", if awareness and understanding of oppressive social and political structures were to be raised.

This "new" focus of intellectual activity and cultural production grew out of significant developments within the arena of education - developments which were initiated by pressures arising from increasing community and worker resistance to state-oppression.

The growth of collective and militant activity within working-class and community politics², brought about an increasing “grassroots” demand for education and information on vital and relevant issues, rooted in the past, yet important for the present. These demands were further reflected in the call for “People’s Education for People’s Power”³, which had emerged from the deepening education crisis within the formal school-system.

The concept of “People’s Education” essentially challenges the hegemonic domination of educational structures and educational content. The role of institutions such as schools and universities (as well as the intellectuals who work within those structures) is seen as reproducing existent class relations (and thus economic, social and political domination of the subordinate classes). Opposition organisations, campaigning for “People’s Education”, emphasise the importance of transforming those structures and their focus, to make them more relevant to, and accessible for the subordinate classes i.e. for groups hitherto excluded therefrom.

The terms “greater accessibility and relevance” essentially call for educational priorities to be reassessed, and made “more appropriate”, for resources to be made available to a broader user-spectrum and, particularly, for structures of “accountability” (a complex and controversial term!) to be established between educational institutions and the organisations of the “democratic opposition movement”.

The implications of these demands for institutions such as universities is not the focus of this dissertation. Instead, a more defined perspective has been chosen: the production of “popular” educational materials, which has come about as a direct consequence of these developments.

The demands for greater educational relevance and “accountability”, expressed by community and labour organisations, are not only directed at the formal institutional structures but particularly at those, who function within them: the intellectuals.

Demands for intellectual activity to be of greater relevance to a broader user-spectrum, than just academic peers and university students, have had an important impact on debate amongst progressive intellectuals about the necessity (and potential) for educational methods and content to move significantly away from traditional avenues. This debate has had a noticeable effect on some formal university courses, and has influenced the focus and methods of on-campus structures (in the case of Wits and UCT), such as the Academic Support Programmes.

But a more significant result of that debate has been the nature and focus of contact-structures between university-based intellectuals and “off-campus” groups. These structures have primarily been established by campus-based “service organisations”, such as, in the case of UCT, the “Industrial Health Group” and the “Community Education Resources” group.

Clearly, right from the outset, issues of relevance and “accountability” were of primary importance to these structures. Traditional channels of interaction between academics, and “users” of intellectual expertise, had to be questioned critically, if the labour of the intellectuals within the service organisations was to have greater relevance for the off-campus “user-groups”, than traditional intellectual production.

The focus of such service-organisations and various off-campus “service-groups”, such as educational and health organisations, has thus been on the provision of research and information which is of direct relevance to organisations of the “mass movement”, to members of the subordinate and working classes.

Recent years have seen a major output in educational materials within a variety of areas, such as health, literacy, labour, education and popular, as well as labour history. A common focus of these materials is their aim of "popularising" knowledge, in that it is made accessible to a far broader user-spectrum, than has been the case with traditional academic production. On a more complex level, these materials aim to "democratise" knowledge and culture, in that an attempt is made at shifting knowledge production away from the tight control of middle-class intellectuals, towards broader cross-cultural participation and relevance. The concept "popular writing" has been established as a collective term for such educational production.

A large variety of groups and individuals have contributed to this production. Within the field of literacy, organisations, such as USWE and LEARN AND TEACH, have produced books and magazines with appropriate language and a contents-level for "popular" relevance and use. USWE's "We came to Town" and the LEARN AND TEACH magazine are but two examples of such materials.

THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION GROUP (Ilrig), and the recently dissolved LABOUR HISTORY GROUP, have produced a variety of materials on labour issues and history. The productions of the former will later be the focus of closer analysis.

Publications such as "Working Women" (SACHED/RAVAN), and "Vukani Makhosikazi: South African Women Speak" (I.Obery/CIIR), have created "official" space for the voices of the most oppressed sector of South African society: black women.

The "People's Workbook" (EDA), and the "Land and People" publications (EDA), as well as products of communal labour, such as

“Sibambene - The Voices of Women at Mboza” (H.Griessel/RAVAN), reflect the realities of rural existence and focus attention on rural issues.

RAVAN PRESS has published a series called “Workers writing”, of which “The Sun shall rise for the Workers” and Petrus Tom’s “The Struggle is my Life” are but two examples - thus providing a publishing outlet for workers’ writing.

Examples of popular publications focussing on both worker and popular history are “Let us speak of freedom” (HISTORY DEPT.,UWC), “The Struggle for Land” (THE ECONOMIC HISTORY RESEARCH GROUP), and the very comprehensive, two-volume “A People’s History of South Africa” (L.Callinicos/RAVAN).

Space and time do not allow for a comprehensive list of all popular materials written and published in South Africa in recent years. The above are but a few examples of such productions in various educational fields.

These productions, as well as articles and reviews written by their authors, form the concrete base for the theoretical analysis of popular writing, which is the focus of chapter 2. The purpose of this analysis is to examine the aim of popular writing in South Africa, and its realisable potential.

Within this dissertation, popular writing is seen as a significant example of recent developments in innovative educational practice attempting to establish creative alternatives to traditional, hierarchical knowledge production. The following analysis attempts to explore tensions and problems within these attempts, as well as the potential to put them into practice.

A necessary “practical” balance to the theoretical investigation is attempted in chapter 3, where the INTERNATIONAL LABOUR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION GROUP (Ilig) is analysed as a case study of popular writing-production.

1.2 THE METHOD AND THE DATA OF THE STUDY

The dissertation is divided into two major sections:

- 1) a focus on the theoretical debate central to popular writing in South Africa;
and
- 2) an analysis of the INTERNATIONAL LABOUR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION GROUP (Ilig) as an illuminative casestudy of popular writing in the "practical arena".

Two methodological approaches have essentially been employed for the gathering and analysis of data for these sections. The initial part of the dissertation is primarily based on a literature survey of

- 1) academic investigations into the popular writing debate; and
- 2) a selection of popular writing-examples (such as those mentioned above).

Furthermore, work-reports by, and interviews with writers of popular materials, as well as personal involvement in the field of literacy (and therefore experience of practical application of some popular materials), have informed this section extensively. The producers are not specifically identified within Chapter Two. The term is instead used as a collective concept for the writers of popular materials, direct examples of which have been quoted above.

The second part of the study focusses on Ilrig as a casestudy of popular writing activity. Participant observation techniques were employed to gather primary data, analysing and evaluating it qualitatively. This essentially entailed attending Ilrig's "communal editing sessions" (principally of the "Mozambique", "Tanzania" and "Kenya" books), and observing and recording writing/editing debates which inevitably focussed on production-purpose and strategies for achieving it. These editing-sessions form the central focus and "backbone" of Ilrig's popular writing production, because they create the vital space for the group's debate about and definition of production-purpose.

The role of the participant observer was seen as the most appropriate to gain information and insight into the "working mechanisms" of the casestudy. This approach has been criticised for its potential lack of "scientific objectivity", as the interpretative bias of the researcher can misrepresent realities. Despite its problematic nature, this approach was chosen, because of an appropriate flexibility in coping with often unpredictable currents and demands (in particular the time-constraints!), of the practical field investigated. As Ruddock emphasises:

...[P]articipant observation ...is not ...as reliable as experimental methods because a different participant observer might come back with a quite different account of events. Nevertheless, it is generally claimed to be truer to the social realities under investigation than other methods. Its immediacy, flexibility and comprehensiveness far outreach the possibilities open to measurement and experiment.⁴

The data collected during these sessions was backed up with extensive interviews, conducted repeatedly with all the members of the group. The role of the participant observer, and the primary data collected under the conditions of action research, essentially make for a casestudy which aims to be primarily illuminative and explanatory, rather than evaluative. What is particularly significant is the emphasis that the Ilrig-activity investigated must be seen as "work in progress". The casestudy thus focusses on a dynamic, ever-changing production process, which inevitably has already moved beyond the defined and static parameters of this investigation.

The case study is based on a variety of collected data. As has been mentioned above, the primary data was gathered during participant observation of a large number of communal editing sessions, as well as from interviews conducted with Ilrig-members. This data was backed up with information provided by Ilrig-materials, such as the initial funding-proposal drawn up by the group, the project-reports reporting about the two "phases" of Ilrig-activity and the results of an evaluation survey which Ilrig conducted amongst various user-groups of its productions. These secondary materials

served well to provide an understanding of the group's own perspective of their work.

A major gap in the casestudy data (and a major problem within this investigation), is the lack of extensive, direct contact to such user-groups. The concrete reader-feedback on Ilrig-materials collected by the researcher is minimal and cannot be seen as representative.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE

It has been mentioned above that the dissertation contains two major parts - a focus on

- 1) the theoretical debate and
- 2) Ilrig as an illuminative casestudy.

Chapter Two looks at the theoretical debate, which is central to the production of popular writing materials in this country. The three most significant elements within popular writing are highlighted and analysed individually, to problematise them sufficiently:

- 1) the purpose of popular writing;
- 2) the producers of popular writing; and
- 3) the readership or users.

The fourth section in Chapter Two has been constructed, to summarise and emphasise the tensions inherent in popular writing purpose. Furthermore, an attempt is made to establish the realisable potential of that purpose.

Chapter Three contains the casestudy, which has been chosen to reflect the theoretical debate within the practical field of popular writing. An initial section serves as an "overview", portraying the origin and history of Ilrig, and the most important developmental phases of the group's production. An analysis of the problems inherent in Ilrig's popular writing production follows - problems which have already been mentioned in the initial overview. The structure of Chapter Two is reflected in this analysis: the

purpose of Ilrig's production is analysed, followed by an investigation of the roles of the Ilrig-producers and the readership. These roles, and the dynamics between them, are essentially the focal point of Ilrig's production purpose and the tensions inherent within it.

The next section focusses on actual examples of Ilrig-production, relating them to the analysis above. Two Ilrig-books have been chosen to illustrate and analyse the production-aim and -process within them. The only concrete reader-feedback collected by the researcher has been added to this section, as some measurement of "use-value" of the Ilrig productions. An entirely different perspective on Ilrig-production completes this section: the reasons provided by the Publications Control Board for the "banning" of the "Mozambique" book provide illuminative insight into state-perception of the aim and effect of popular materials such as the Ilrig-productions.

The final section and conclusion of the casestudy attempts to place the preceding portrayal and analysis into the ever-changing parameters of Ilrig's "work-in-progress".

Chapter Four, the shortest, yet most significant section of the dissertation, attempts to draw the theory and the practice together. The central question is emphasised once again: what are the problems inherent in the purpose of popular writing, and to what extent can this purpose be realised? The theoretical analysis and the conclusions drawn from the casestudy are merged in an attempt to define conclusive results.

1.4 DEFINING THE PROBLEMATIC TERMS

For the sake of clarity, it is seen as important briefly to define the most central and problematic terms employed throughout the dissertation.

The concept “popular writing” has already been elaborated upon. Within this study it is seen as a term describing a particular kind of (written) educational production, which aims to popularise and democratise knowledge and culture. In this sense it is seen as an example of innovative educational practice, aiming to create alternatives to the hierarchical structures of traditional knowledge-production.

The term “producers” is largely employed to describe those groups and/or individuals, who are involved in the writing and production of popular materials.

The concept “readership” within popular writing somewhat moves beyond its conventional definition. In Chapter 2.3 the term “readership” is described as follows: “the readers are not only the perceived ‘users’ of the written materials, but are also the central subject of investigation, and ideally perceived as active participants in that investigation process”.

The terms “popular” and “popularising” are seen to signify the entirely different view of “audience” and “readership” which distinguishes popular writing, from traditional academic production: the “popular” readership is that broad mass of subordinate groups and classes which has largely been marginalised by traditional knowledge-production.

The term “democratising”, frequently employed in the sense of “democratising knowledge and culture”, envisages a major shift away from the traditional channels of knowledge-production. These channels are to be “democratised”, i.e. they are to be “opened” to broader participation, thereby undermining exclusive academic control, and creating forms of

knowledge which are empowering rather than exploitative. It is hoped that the use of this concept within the dissertation will further clarify its meaning.

Finally, it needs to be emphasised that the term “knowledge” within the dissertation is primarily understood as a political, rather than an epistemological deployment⁵. In other words, the control over the production of knowledge and knowledge resources, is seen as significant political and social control.

Knowledge itself is contested terrain, and understanding the establishment of a certain form of knowledge as an ‘order of discourse’ is simply another way of understanding the class struggle, since certain forms of knowledge provide the very conditions under which classes may exist and develop.⁶

1.5 THE CENTRAL RESEARCH PROBLEMS

The central research problems should have been mentioned in section 1.2, as they are inextricably linked to problems of methodology. But it seemed necessary to give them a separate mention, as they constitute major tensions and shortcomings within this research.

It is very difficult to establish a comprehensive and useful critical analysis of popular writing in South Africa - an analysis which attempts to relate theory to practice for the sake of mutual enrichment. This difficulty stems from the fact that a thorough investigation into the practical arena makes weighty demands on precious organisational time - both in the case of groups which are producers of popular materials, and organisations which can be identified as user-groups of such materials.

The pressures and demands of the “active, real-life world” create far more pressing agendas for these groups and organisations. Research into educational issues, which might not be central to immediate needs, is unlikely to be perceived a major priority.

In the case of Ilrig, it was indeed possible to set up and maintain sufficient contact for adequate participant observation and on-going dialogue (in the form of interviews) with Ilrig-members, in order to inform the research process significantly.

In the case of sufficient and effective readership-contact, serious problems were encountered. Repeated attempts to establish contact with user-groups of Ilrig-materials were thwarted due to lack of organisational time. Only one interview was conducted with a facilitator of a trade union education workshop and reading-group. This has clearly led to a serious lack in concrete knowledge about reader-perceptions and -use of Ilrig books. Instead, most of the observations on readership had to be based on materials and evidence collected by Ilrig.

The anonymity of the readership has been a major problem of most investigations into popular writing. Conceptualising the purpose of popular writing and assessing the rate of success of popular materials, is thus a particularly difficult task.

The analysis undertaken and conclusions reached within this research, therefore had to be based primarily on broad currents of academic investigations and the practical perceptions of popular writing producers, rather than concrete evidence and understanding of "grassroots" use and perception of the materials in question.

A dire need therefore exists for thorough research into "popular reading" and the effect of particular productions on a popular readership. The lack of such research is a major gap within this dissertation. The defined parameters and severe time-limitations imposed on this research, did not, however, allow for a further investigation of that "gap".

These limitations constitute a major shortcoming of the dissertation. The subject under investigation and all its implications cannot be given its full due within a study of such limited length. As a result, some pertinent issues can only be superficially raised.

A further problem of this study is the tension which exists between the format and nature of this enquiry, and the subject of the research. It seems ironical, that an investigation into popular writing and the accessibility of knowledge production should choose the shape and format of an academic paper exclusively suitable for academic consumption. A logical (and necessary) further step would thus be a reconstruction of this dissertation, to make it accessible to, and useful for, a "popular readership" !

CHAPTER 2

THE THEORETICAL DEBATE:

POPULAR WRITING IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 THE PURPOSE OF POPULAR WRITING

The parameters of the terms “popular writing” and “popular production”, for the purpose of this analysis, have been defined in the introductory chapter. It is now necessary to investigate the purpose underlying popular writing, to establish a more coherent understanding of the aims and intentions that characterise it.

It must be emphasised once again that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to identify a clear common denominator for all popular writing in South Africa. Great diversity exists not only in the form, content, style, presentation, distribution targets and areas, but also in the producers’ understanding of the aim and goal of their materials. Despite this diversity, some important and central common features can be identified. These common features will be the focus of this chapter - in order to portray and analyse the core debates and tensions of popular writing activity in this country.

The most simplistic definition of “purpose” in popular writing is the aim to make information and research available to a broader and far more diverse audience, than the closely defined “peer”- and “expert”- focus of traditional academic production. The aim of popular writing? To “popularise” knowledge, in that it is made accessible, and on a more complex level, to “democratise” the structures of knowledge production (the meaning of these terms has been explained in the introductory chapter), by enabling the broader participation of hitherto excluded groups and classes within those

structures. Clearly, this has important implications for the established channels of traditional knowledge production and transmission.

In Bozzoli's words:

The act of making historical and social research available to broader audiences...can be summed up as one of "counter-hegemony".¹

The aim of making hitherto exclusive knowledge accessible to an audience, historically largely excluded from the processes of knowledge production, is indeed counter-hegemonic. It carries with it the implications of changed discourse, as well as changed power relations within these processes.

Making research and information accessible to a broader audience has inevitably meant that the primary focus of popular writing materials has been on the dominated and underprivileged classes and groups in South African society. These classes have not only been excluded from, but have clearly been disadvantaged by traditional knowledge production. As many producers of popular writing have stated, the intention of making knowledge accessible is inextricably linked to the intention to empower the target audience/readership, through the provision of "knowledge-tools" which have been unattainable by that readership. The intention to "empower" essentially aims at a significant conscientization-process, intending to affect the power and control structures of knowledge production and transmission. It is a process which is aiming to affect, in Sohn-Rethel's terms, the mental/manual division of labour in capitalist society², aiming to overcome

the rigorous division of status and roles between those who speak and those who listen, those who transmit and those reduced to being eternal receptacles, representatives and represented, and between educators and educated.³

This sweeping portrayal of popular-writing-purpose clearly needs to be problematised and critically investigated - a critique, which can only be undertaken though, once the process of "popularising", and the existent dynamics between the producers and audience/readership, have been sufficiently analysed.

The process of "popularising" - which can in no way be separated from the purpose - has often been misunderstood to mean merely a simplified form and presentation of complex academic, theoretical knowledge. This simplification process (in terms of language, content, form and presentation) is indeed important for certain popular writing materials, as far as it creates access routes to an existing body of theoretical knowledge.

It removes the "jargon-shroud" from academic discourse (created to ensure exclusivity), and, through simpler and clearer language- and concept-structures, allows for a broader audience to "tap" and therefore utilise a hitherto exclusive and often reified knowledge realm. Materials which present complex theoretical knowledge and research in a simple, clear and hence more accessible form, thus fulfill an important role: a process is initiated to broaden the base of knowledge transmission and distribution. In other words, academic research is made more relevant to a broader audience without university roots (a relevance which significant sections of the "liberal" English medium universities in South Africa are keenly striving for!).

The purpose of popular writing though, as stated by many producers of popular materials, goes beyond merely "simplifying" academic knowledge. The above-mentioned "simplification" process does not sufficiently question the structures of knowledge production, let alone the power to identify, generate and validate knowledge sources and processes. In short, merely simplifying theoretical knowledge to make it more accessible is an important element, but not the core-focus of popular writing production.

This core-focus is extremely complex. Its definition depends largely on the producers' understanding of social, political and economic structures, as well as their understanding of the transformation of those structures. It has been said before that many producers of popular writing materials aim to "empower" the readership through the information/knowledge provided.

The concept "empowerment" here incorporates the aim to create a critical consciousness which enables recognition and understanding of social structures and forces which are responsible for the often dominated and exploited position of the readership. On a more ambitious level, the development of critical consciousness is linked to the aim of stimulating transforming action - a much debated and controversial aim which needs to be investigated at a later stage.

It is clear that the mere simplification of established theoretical research and the creation of access routes to academic skills and knowledge tools, cannot in themselves create a critical consciousness in the readers. Instead a significant shift of focus is necessary, a shift which calls the established notions of defining "valuable" and "important" knowledge sources into question. As Callinicos has emphasised, popular writing seeks to counter hegemony-dominated knowledge structures,

by putting those marginalised in nationalist, colonial and bourgeois history - blacks, workers, women, children, the unemployed and minority groups - at the centre of the stage.⁴

Thus the reality and struggles of the dominated groups in South African society are the central focus of popular writing. This has injected an entirely different status into that reality which has largely been ignored, marginalised or misrepresented by "mainstream", established, theoretical research forms. With this shift in focus, popularisers attempt

...to supplement or replace the dominant culture - creating, making space for, developing ways for distributing, the self-expression of the working class people themselves, so that the dominant views will not have a free field.⁵

The recording and analysis of popular experience in formally researched, published materials fulfill a necessary and important role.

...[F]or popular feelings to be known and studied in the way in which they present themselves objectively and for them not to be considered something negligible and inert within the movement of history...⁶

...is a significant part of popular writing purpose. Research and production-space is provided for the self-representation of the perceptions and experiences of subordinate classes. This firstly initiates an important and largely neglected process of formally recording a significant experiential knowledge-realm. Through structures such as personal testimony, oral history, songs, poems, photographs and other cultural manifestations⁷, the "voiceless are given a voice", i.e. formal space to present their experiences, views and perceptions of historical and social dynamics, which have been primarily researched and presented from the dominant perspective of those in control of capital and knowledge resources. This serves to create a counter-memory, calling that dominant perspective into question:

How else, at a time like our own, are we to suppose that there can ever be any human remedy to the hegemonic domination of the mind, the false descriptions of reality reproduced daily by the media? Experience I (lived experience) is in eternal friction with imposed consciousness, and, as it breaks through, we, who fight in all the intricate vocabularies and disciplines of Experience II (perceived experience), are given moments of openness and opportunity before the mould of ideology is imposed once more.⁸

Secondly, popular writing, through providing formal research and publication structures for popular self-representation, aims to inject a different knowledge status into popular experience and perceptions.

A largely neglected and often ignored knowledge-realm becomes an important focus, becomes knowledge “worth knowing, researching and investigating”. In this way popular writing does not only aim to counter the hegemonic domination of perspectives and perceptions published in mainstream social and historical research, and reflected in most media-apparatuses. It also aims to change the established channels of knowledge generation and definition.

These channels, be they institution-bound or media-related, have essentially created knowledge as a commodity, which is purchasable, consumable and exchangeable. The majority of “knowledge-consumers”, be they university students or the media-manipulated public, have no control over the processes of knowledge generation, definition and production though. This control rests in the hands of a relatively very small number of intellectuals.

Through shifting self-representation and experiential knowledge of the target-readership/-users into the centre of knowledge production, popular writing aims to include the readership (and hence consumers) more centrally and actively in the production process. Materials are written to provide a formal space for the largely suppressed views and perceptions of the subordinate classes. Defining the knowledge-focus for the production process of research and material writing can thus theoretically not take place without consultation and interaction between producers and readership/users. The way and extent to which that consultation and interaction can take place, significantly affects the extent to which popular writing can affect a change of traditional knowledge production and initiate a democratisation of that production process.

Inevitably the “use-” and “communication-” value of knowledge becomes emphasised as

...in theory, popular writing or “popular print” has the potential for enabling “growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways”.⁹

Clearly the element of “knowledge as commodity” cannot be negated or eradicated within popular writing production. Purchasable materials are published which are distributed and “consumed”. Yet the “exchange value” of popular knowledge is inextricably linked to its “use-value”. Novel communication channels between the producers and readership, with the emphasis on self-representation to enable a shift in knowledge definition and generation, all aim towards the democratisation of knowledge production, which, in turn, attempts to characterise “knowledge” as a “relationship between people”¹⁰. These new production channels thus emphasise the use-value of knowledge, rather than the commodity nature created within the hierarchical structures of traditional knowledge production, where producers have exclusive control.

The focus on self-representation aims to provide space for this disadvantaged readership to recognise the value and importance of their experiential knowledge-realm, to know “that they can know”. In Siegelau’s words, popular writing thus potentially

...plays a very special role in the historical transmission of accumulated experiences, struggles and ideas, in the creation of a certain type of consciousness, a certain memory in the formation of a certain type of human being, a certain type of creativity, and with it, a type of culture and society.¹¹

A thorough investigation (inextricably linked to the complex debate about the exchange-/use-value of popular knowledge) into the potential of popular writing to become a significant part of cultural production, and thereby to have a significant psychological impact on the target-readership, goes beyond the realm of this analysis. A superficial portrayal of this debate must here suffice, while emphasising its importance for the understanding of “popular-writing-purpose”.

The terms "empowerment" and "critical consciousness" must now be more closely investigated, terms which have been mentioned earlier as central concepts within the definition of popular-writing-purpose.

It is clear that the creation of space for self-representation in popular writing cannot in itself ensure that the readership becomes "empowered" with an analytical perception and understanding of its historical and social circumstances and position.

The sources for self-representation in popular writing i.e. "authentic" perceptions and perspectives expressed by members of subordinate and oppressed social groups and classes, are in themselves ideological.

Testimonies ...inevitably relate, more or less, to the "dominant discourses" and are not apart from them. So, while we respect and learn from, for example, the experiences of workers who feel in their innermost being that it is as blacks, or women, or as members of a minority group that they feel oppressed and/or exploited, we also need to locate them and ourselves at a particular point of the productive process and in the social structure.¹²

Another element thus has to be fused with that of self-representation in order to provide critical and analytical information about significant historical and social structures and processes because

The way in which people spontaneously perceive their oppression may even "veil" the real source of their oppression, and the mere presentation of their lived experience may in fact hinder rather than help their struggle against that oppression.¹³

Popular writing therefore aims to merge a synthesis and a clarification of theoretical insights with that "mere presentation", in order to, in the tradition of critical theory, provide the conceptual tools to potentially create empowering critical consciousness in the readership. The testimonies and experiential knowledge of the oppressed and dominated need to be balanced with critical theoretical observation, in order to create a more thorough and coherent understanding of particular social structures and dynamics. As important as it is not to neglect the status and significance of experiential

knowledge, it is also vital not to elevate it beyond its realm and usefulness. A continual dialogue has to be established between theory and active experience, both knowledge realms carrying equal importance in the aim of instilling a critical consciousness in the reader.

Gramsci has described this process as establishing a critique of "common sense" to enable the development of its positive nucleus¹⁴ of "good sense". The term "common sense" he defines as

...the conception of the world which is uncritically absorbed by the various social and cultural environments in which the moral individuality of the average man is developed... It is not a single unique conception, identical in time and space. It is the "folklore" of philosophy ... it takes countless different forms.¹⁵

...[It is] the uncritical and largely unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become "common" in any given epoch.¹⁶

"Good sense" can only be established through an important educative process which calls the assumptions and beliefs basic to "common sense" into question, and counter-balances them with illuminative critique. A core aim of popular writing is therefore the development of that "good sense" in the readership. "Good sense" - which can be equated with critical consciousness - is thus not merely an instinctive perception and understanding of experience (as that has inevitably been strongly moulded by dominant discourses), but the development of a *critical* understanding of experience. The "making available" of theoretical conceptual tools to the readership is an important part of developing that critical consciousness.

To summarise, the purpose of popular writing is essentially "multi-dimensional" and cannot be reduced to a single, simplified concept. It attempts to create access routes to the realm of cultural knowledge production for an audience/readership which has largely been excluded from and disadvantaged by the traditional structures of knowledge production. Popular writing thus aims to disestablish the traditional channels and

structures of knowledge definition and transmission, to shift a hitherto marginalised and neglected knowledge realm - the experiential knowledge of subordinate groups and classes - into the central stage of cultural production. As has been discussed before, this shift in knowledge-definition/focus, and thus status, carries important "psycho-cultural" implications for the target-readership with it. The shift in focus emphasises the "use-value" of knowledge beyond its "exchange-value". It also emphasises the nature of knowledge as communication and relationship between people, rather than as a traditional, purchasable, exchangeable commodity. This debate has only been superficially touched upon, as its complexity and dimensions essentially extend beyond the scope of this analysis.

Popular writing in South Africa thus emphasises a different central focus to essentially Euro-centric, traditional academic knowledge production, which is largely removed from (and therefore has remained irrelevant to) the reality and experiences of the oppressed South African majority.

Through this shift of focus, popular writing attempts to make the theoretical conceptual tools of traditional academic discipline, such as research and analysis, accessible and useful to an audience/readership, both different to and broader than the defined readership parameters of traditional academic knowledge production. The interaction and dialogue between theoretical and experiential knowledge attempt to create a critical consciousness in the readership, which enables a "new", more critical and perceptive understanding of their historical and social position. Different perspectives are created on research into, and accounts of, historical and social developments and structures which are ruled by dominant discourses. Different perspectives which aim to create critical perceptions such as those exhibited by Brecht's "Worker Reading History" (to refer to the poem quoted at the beginning of this analysis).

A further debatable aim of popular writing, closely linked to the "creation" of critical consciousness, has only thus far received brief mention: the aim not only of developing a critical consciousness in the popular readership, but also of stimulating an active challenging and transformation of oppressive social structures by that readership.

The focus on transformation carries with it major implications for the "disestablishment" of traditional knowledge production and transmission channels. Successfully creating space for the self-representation of experiential knowledge, the continual interaction between theory and the experiential perceptions of readers, the creation of a critical consciousness in the reader, and, finally, the aim of channelling readership-energy towards transforming- action, all rely on one thing: the potential of popular writing to move significantly away from traditional knowledge-production routes.

Particularly the traditional relationship between the producers of knowledge and their consumers, needs to be exploded to change the power and control structures of traditional knowledge production. It has been mentioned before that the focus on "transforming action" within popular writing is a controversial and debatable one; as it relies on the successful fusion of theory and practice to enable action. This aspect can only be more thoroughly investigated once the potential of popular writing to "disestablish"¹⁷ traditional structures has been examined.

It now becomes vital to ask to what extent popular writing can achieve such a significant shift from traditional channels. To what extent can popular writing realise its purpose and aims?

The portrayal of popular-writing-purpose in this chapter has up to now largely been descriptive. The different "dimensions" of purpose have been stated without any critical investigation of their actual, realisable potential. This investigation is to follow. It can only be undertaken through an analysis of the roles that the producers and readership play in the popular writing

process. Their roles, as well as the existent dynamics between them, are essentially the "testing-ground" for the actual potential of popular writing, to explode - significantly - the traditional discourse and control structures of established academic knowledge production.

2.2 THE PRODUCERS OF POPULAR WRITING

The above description and analysis of popular writing purpose has left the role of the producers and readers within the production process in a shroud of anonymity. Although these roles are inextricably linked to one another, it is necessary, for the purpose of this investigation, to separate them artificially to gain a better understanding of their significance within the process of popular writing, as well as their potential to escape from the traditional mould of producer - reader relationship.

The purpose of popular writing to interrelate experiential knowledge with theoretical insight and understanding, clearly demands particular production skills. The producers/writers must not only record experiential knowledge, but must also possess the skills to undertake rigorous theoretical research which needs to be transmitted in an accessible form. In South Africa, due to an excessively unbalanced education system, these skills lie mostly in the hands of white, university trained intellectuals.

...Clearly, there is a social division of intellectual labour - the knowledge and skills which are needed to record and situate people's experiences are dominated by the bourgeois institutions of higher education. For this reason most ...writers of popular history are products of a white, middle-class culture. Yet in South Africa it is mostly these people who have the resources and the time to impart some theoretical meaning to the experiences...of the working class.¹⁸

The majority of popular writing producers can thus be defined as university-trained intellectuals, rooted within a largely different cultural environment to that of the target-readership. This immediately poses important questions about the relationship between the producers/ writers

and the readers: how can experiential knowledge be realistically and adequately recorded, if the writers are substantially removed from the cultural background informing those experiences? To what extent can the dynamics between producers and readers move beyond the parameters defined by traditional knowledge-production, if the producers of popular writing materials are also university-trained/-based intellectuals (therefore having the same background as traditional "knowledge-producers") and are thus potentially removed from the "everyday" reality of the readers?

It seems inevitable that the production of popular writing will initially remain in the hands of university-trained intellectuals. As Callinicos has pointed out, both the skills and time-resources necessary for the production-process of written materials lie in the hands of those intellectuals. To what extent then, can and must the producers of popular writing move beyond the realms of exclusivity defined by traditional intellectual activity?

A distinct move away from exclusivity is vital to enable a type of producer - reader contact and interaction that can fulfill popular writing purpose.

The "exclusivity" which seems to characterise the position of traditional intellectuals, and which inhibits dynamic interaction between producers/writers and readers, has been clearly illustrated in Gramsci's study regarding the roles of "traditional" and "organic" intellectuals:

The popular element "feels" but does not always know or understand; the intellectual element "knows" but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel...

The intellectual's error consists in believing that one can know without understanding and even more without feeling and being impassioned...in other words that the intellectual can be an intellectual ...if distinct and separate from the people nation...without feeling the elementary passions of the people, understanding them and therefore explaining and justifying them in the particular historical situation and connecting them dialectically to the laws of history and to a superior conception of the world...i.e.knowledge...In the absence of such a nexus the relations between the intellectual and the people nation are...relationships of a purely bureaucratic and formal order; the intellectuals become a caste, or a priesthood.¹⁹

The notion of traditional intellectuals constituting a “priesthood” existing within an “ivory tower” of exclusive theoretical knowledge, emphasises the isolation between those intellectuals and the majority of people who are not academic peers or holders of capital and state power (the “capital” beneficiaries of academic research). Sohn-Rethel has described this isolation as caused by the “fetishism of intellectual labour” - brought about by the increasing division between mental and manual labour in modern capitalist society, the division between theory and practice, between practical and expert knowledge.

Traditional intellectual labour largely “shrouds” its skills from the “non-expert”, thereby ensuring exclusive control over the processes of knowledge-production, generation and validation. The non-expert thus remains at best a passive consumer of, and at worst, entirely excluded from (if not disadvantaged by !) these processes. Academic knowledge remains in a reified realm, its producers constantly aiming to

..reproduce the cultural dominant that places a high value on theoretical as opposed to practical or applied knowledge.²⁰

Productive channels of interaction, between this intellectual production and the practical consciousness of the “popular mind” (necessary for the development of critical consciousness, as defined by popular writing purpose), do not exist. Instead, that practical consciousness is mostly marginalised, if not ignored by traditional knowledge production. Furthermore traditional academia does not make its methods and “tools” available to the popular element so that academic skills are “shared” rather than “shrouded”.

It therefore becomes clear that the producers of popular writing must undertake a significant shift away from traditional knowledge production, so that productive channels of interaction between practical consciousness and theoretical knowledge can be established. In Gramsci’s words:

If the relationship between intellectuals and people nation...is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders and led, and can the shared life be realised which alone is a social force - with the creation of the "historical bloc".²¹

Gramsci further emphasises that this change of relationship can only occur if the position of the traditional intellectual has been exchanged for that of the organic intellectual:

...the mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organiser...²²

The role of the organic intellectual he further describes as

...distinguished less by their profession (any job characteristic of their class), than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong.²³

The formation of the organic intellectual therefore does not come about within the university framework, but rather within the parameters of "practical" work and existence, such as the factory floor.

The nature and function of the organic intellectual within the South African environment is highly complex. Although these intellectuals are present within the ranks of the working and subordinate classes (their identity will be more clearly illustrated in the chapter discussing "readership"), the system has largely made it impossible for them to acquire adequate literacy skills, let alone the advanced academic skills necessary for thorough theoretical research. As has been mentioned above these skills lie mostly in the hands of (mostly white) university-trained and/or -based intellectuals.

Unlike the ruling classes, the subordinate classes often lack "organic intellectuals" to make more coherent their philosophies. The philosophy to be found in the testimony of ordinary people is indeed a challenge to the capacity of such trained intellectuals to interpret and understand, without simplifying, or attempting to reduce popular consciousness to those aspects most beloved of the intellectual concerned.²⁴

The question must therefore be raised once again: to what extent can the producers of popular writing, who are largely middle-class, university-trained intellectuals fulfill the role of "organic intellectual" for the target readership? Is a mere "interest in" and "commitment to record experiential knowledge of struggle and oppression" sufficient for the producers to "feel" and "understand" in Gramsci's terms? Can the necessary interaction between practical and theoretical knowledge happen cross-culturally and across class parameters? Or can only "organic intellectuals", as defined by Gramsci, fulfill the role of popular writing producers successfully?

The isolation of intellectuals (also of "progressive" intellectuals - those concerned with social and political change, with changing knowledge/power relations) from the subordinate classes and their organisations has, in recent debates, always been linked to the complex and controversial concept "accountability". It is argued that progressive intellectuals and academics can overcome the isolating divide, by making themselves and consequently their labour more "accountable" to the organisations of the subordinate classes. A shift in accountability-structures is thus envisaged - from the traditional and "conserving" intellectual, mostly accountable to the university as an institution, and consequently the power elites which finance that institution, to the progressive intellectual, accountable to the organisations of the working and subordinate classes. In 1987 Jay Naidoo of Cosatu summarised this need of intellectual accountability in a speech given to health service organisations:

...A service organisation cannot exist external to the mass movement it serves...It may seem tedious but service organisations must always bear in mind that their role is to transfer the expertise and skills that they have to workers.

We [Cosatu] very definitely do not require the strategic intervention of individuals or groups that may want to reduce everything to ideas that are very laudable but exist outside any mass organisation.²⁵

The message seems clear, but the implications are very complex. Two demands are expressed: firstly, the intellectual is required to make available, “hand over” her/his skills to the “mass movement” i.e. “transfer the expertise and skills that they have to the workers”; and secondly, the intellectual must remain accountable to the organisations of the mass movement. Both demands are problematic.

The latter expresses a real need of direct contact and interaction between intellectual activity and the needs of the mass movement (seen as representative of a large percentage of “the people”). It carries with it problematic implications of “answerability” though. The negative implications of accountability-structures tying the traditional academic to the needs and demands of institutions governed and controlled by state and capital power, are also inherent in the above demands for accountability. Accountability-structures which are not continually critically questioned and negotiated can too easily lead to restrictions upon the exploration “of uncomfortable avenues not hitherto considered or welcomed by a particular audience.”²⁶ , only allowing the accepted voice of the party or movement “line”.

The former demand clearly expresses the need for intellectuals/academics to share their skills rather than “shroud” them, to make “knowledge-tools” available to a disadvantaged audience. It is clear that access to knowledge and information is of vital importance to social and political movements attempting to challenge state and capital power:

...“challenging power requires knowledge”. If inequality and exploitation are created by excluding knowledge from subordinate groups and classes, then combatting inequality requires creating tunnels for knowledge back into those movements.²⁷

Furthermore it is clear that the traditional channels and structures of the established system do not provide for “the flow of knowledge” back into the subordinate groups and classes.

...the acquisition of [credentialled] knowledge [necessary to challenge power] is organised so that it reinforces the very credentially-based system of power that is in part the original object of contestation.²⁸

It is questionable though, whether the demand for intellectuals to "hand over", or "transfer" their skills to the subordinate classes, can fulfill their need for knowledge acquisition adequately. The intellectual essentially is required to become a "handmaiden"²⁹ of subordinate classes to make necessary knowledge accessible and useful to them.

Clearly these dynamics have to exist to some extent within the South African context due to the unequal division of skills discussed earlier. It must also be realised though, that these dynamics have problematic implications for the aim of breaking down and democratising traditional knowledge structures. The "handmaiden-model" leaves unquestioned the role of the intellectual as the expert, and the complete dependency of the subordinate classes on that expert:

If it is the case that "knowledges" are not merely produced by one or other class but rather that they provide the very conditions under which classes may exist and develop, then handing over the knowledge may simply mean reproducing inequality...It is also that the question of "handing over" tacitly acknowledges that the academic is the expert, that he/she is indispensable - and therefore reproduces the relation of dependency between academics and subordinate groups.³⁰

The "handmaiden-model" overlooks the intricate networks of the politics of knowledge. It overlooks the question of control and power over such structures as the generation and accreditation of knowledge - a detailed analysis of which goes beyond the scope of this investigation.

If the aim is to democratise knowledge structures, to create channels of interaction between theoretical knowledge and practical consciousness to produce critical understanding, a more complex relationship between intellectuals/producers and the popular consciousness/readers than the one structured by the "handmaiden-model" must be entered into.

Muller and Cloete, in their article "The White Hands", elaborate on two methods of sociological knowledge production which aim to set that democratisation-process into motion using different avenues to the "handmaiden-model": participatory action research (PR) and Touraine's "Intervention sociology".

Although these approaches cannot be directly "transplanted" into the arena of popular writing, they carry significant implications for the research processes feeding into popular writing production. They therefore deserve some attention.

Both approaches have made significant contributions to the attempt to move away from traditional channels of knowledge production, an attempt to discover avenues of production and dissemination which are empowering, rather than exploitative to the marginalised and subordinate. Yet both approaches also suffer from the shortcoming of, once again, tending to leave initiative and control extensively in the hands of the intellectuals.

To summarise briefly: the key elements of participatory action research

...include a rejection of "value- neutrality", a focus on community problems, an educational process for researchers and participants alike, and a respect for the potential of communities to produce knowledge and "liberate" themselves.³¹

Yet in most cases of PR-work, the particular community and the particular problem/problems to be researched have been chosen by the researcher. This inevitably puts the researcher into a greater position of control, whereas the community remains the dependent "client" - as in the "handmaiden-model".

This problem becomes aggravated by the unequal distribution of time- and skill-resources: even if "the respect for the potential of communities to produce knowledge" is strong and everpresent, the community members participating in the research process are very often occupied with many more

immediate and pressing needs and demands, than the contribution to and interpretation of particular research initiatives. The interpretation of research data etc. thus very often remains solely in the hands of the researcher, once again imposing her/his perspectives onto the community. The "potential" for community knowledge production is thus not successfully realised.

Touraine's intervention sociology, on the other hand, envisages a model where the researcher engages with an already established social movement characterised by its own specific strategies and problems.

The academic's role then becomes to help the process of movement and strategy formation, not to initiate or control it.³²

This model thus makes it quite feasible for the movement to employ the researcher within its own agenda, to its own specifications - a scenario which the PR-structure does not seem to provide for. The contact between researcher and movement in Touraine's model, is to open avenues for a dynamic dialogue between the practical consciousness of the movement and the theoretical knowledge of the researcher:

Strategically directed knowledge is one form of knowledge - theoretically directed knowledge is another. For Touraine, both are incomplete. The purpose of their intervention is precisely to create a forum for their mutual enrichment. In this sense research becomes educative for both movement activist and academic. The resulting form of "integrated knowledge" or "good sense" is the real aim of this research.³³

It is questionable though to what extent a "real-life" application of the Touraine model, allows for a truly innovative relationship between the researcher and the popular element. The success of this model is essentially dependent on the commitment of both parties to the interaction of their knowledge realms for "mutual enrichment", on a basis of mutual self-respect, rather than risking domination by one party over the other.

Muller and Cloete critique both the PR and Touraine's model for emphasising the "issue of knowledge and consciousness in terms of 'hierarchical binary opposites' with one term of the opposition always privileged over the other"³⁴. In this way, the concept of "true consciousness" has higher intrinsic value than "false consciousness". The two models for sociological intervention attempt to replace the "subordinate" term with the "privileged" one (in this case "true consciousness"), leaving little doubt that the researcher has control over the privileged term and thus the power to instil it in the community. The community, in turn, is "pre-defined" as having access only to the subordinate or "secondary" term, and is thus reliant on the researcher for enlightenment.

This approach potentially oversimplifies the process of democratising knowledge and knowledge structures, as it does not call the role of the researcher/intellectual sufficiently into question: primary control over the knowledge-process still remains in her/his hands.

Muller and Cloete attempt to define an alternative approach where the role of the intellectual is "disestablished" still further:

The act of engagement should rather be seen as accomplishing two things. The first is that the articulation of the academic's erudite knowledge with the local knowledge of the community provides a forum for the release of the subjugated memories of what Foucault calls "the positive unconscious of knowledge". It is not simply conditional upon the knowledge of the academic or upon his or her initiative. This is one implication of the anti-hierarchical view of knowledge: it is not so much that the academic converts "common sense" into "good sense". It is rather the act of engagement which brings the counter-memories "into play".

The second aim of the act of engagement is to set in train a process of empowerment. Asking people for their views implicitly affirms that local knowledge is important...accords [it] a value which [it] had previously been deprived of.³⁵

This view of engagement is particularly significant for popular writing. It emphasises that the intellectuals, i.e. the producers of popular writing production, must explode the traditional parameters of intellectual activity and control significantly, in order to realise popular writing purpose successfully (the “popularising” and “democratising” of knowledge and the structures of knowledge production, to empower those hitherto marginalised and disadvantaged by that production).

This chapter has attempted to investigate the producers of popular writing. It was shown that most producers of popular writing materials are university-trained and/or -based intellectuals, rooted within middle-class culture. This immediately raised the question to what extent these producers had moved, and could move away from the role and position of “traditional intellectual”, in order to fulfill the purpose of popular writing adequately.

Many recent debates concerning the role of the “progressive intellectual” in South Africa (and pursuant thereupon, possible isolation from the majority of the population) have raised the question of accountability of the intellectual to the organisations of the subordinate and working classes. It was illustrated though, that the demands for accountability did not provide for creative and innovative interaction-channels between intellectuals and subordinate groups; they did not provide a basis for the effective democratisation of knowledge-structures.

For this reason, various sociological models attempting to democratise knowledge channels were briefly investigated. Muller and Cloete’s perspective of social engagement (quoted at length), was seen as most significant for this investigation. They strongly emphasise a necessary shift in the intellectual’s role, from that of controlling the engagement process (still present in the “handmaiden”, “PR” and “Touraine” models), to an “anti-hierarchical” position, where intellectuals/producers have an equal status to the subordinate groups/readers with whom they are interacting, thereby ensuring

a productive, and effective, "union of erudite knowledge and local memories" (the emphasis being on "union").

Inevitably it becomes necessary to ask to what extent this is possible within the framework of popular writing. Alone the physical reality of producing written materials, puts the producers into a particular role which is difficult, if not impossible, to open to non-hierarchical, wholly-democratised interaction.

What then are the implications of terms such as "anti-hierarchical", "empowerment", "democratise" etc., for the producers and the production process?

The full implications of these terms - for the purpose and realisable potential of popular writing - can only be realistically investigated once the role of the producers has been linked to that most significant element within the production process of popular writing: the readership.

2.3 THE DEFINITION AND ROLE OF THE READERSHIP

The question of "readership" within the popular writing process is of central importance, and highlights many of the complexities and tensions inherent therein. The concept "readership" within popular writing differs significantly from its conventional meaning, as the readers are not only the perceived "users" of the written materials, but are also the central subject of investigation and ideally perceived as active participants in that investigation process.

Despite its importance, the definition and nature of the readership role within popular writing is largely an unknown quantity. Very little empirical research has been undertaken specifically to investigate the readership element, and particularly its relationship to various popular writing materials.

In the previous sub-chapters, rather vague and elusive terms were chosen to concretise the concept of "readership" somehow. The "target-audience" of popular writing materials was described as "the subordinate groups and classes" within South African society; those oppressed and dominated by the ruling structures in society, marginalised and disadvantaged by traditional knowledge-production.

Most producers/writers would indeed define their intended readership in these terms. They would further stress, that the primary aim of their production lay in "giving the voiceless a voice", in empowering the disadvantaged through making "knowledge-tools" accessible and including subordinate groups in an innovative knowledge-production process.

Such definitions are, however, problematic, as the terms are excessively broad and "slippery". They do not allow for a concrete understanding of the specific nature of the readership. Consequently, it is difficult to establish an understanding of the relationship existing between producers and readers. As has been stated before, the nature of that relationship is central to an investigation of popular writing purpose and its potential to significantly "disestablish" traditional knowledge production. It is therefore important to attempt a more specific definition of the term "readership" and the role it plays within the process of popular writing.

The specific definition of readership is of pivotal importance to any popular writing production. Firstly, the aim, content and form of the materials must be formulated according to the defined "readership-focus". The "Labour History Group" - a Cape Town based popular writing group, now merged with Ilrig - states in a paper presented at the 1984 Wits History Workshop:

When we have asked people to advise us in language, presentation etc., they have always asked who we are aiming at. Trade union activists or "ordinary workers"? What level of formal education? First, second or third language readers? The answer to these questions affects the simplicity of the language required, whether we translate in pure, "deep" Xhosa and Zulu or the more colloquial urban dialects, whether we need to explain concepts such as economy, recession, capitalism and so on.³⁶

Secondly, a particular definition of readership inevitably reflects the producers' interpretation of social, political and economic dynamics and structures, and particularly of how transformation of those structures can come about.

The carving out of such a definition is a problematic task, for it is essentially a political act: - it is based on the writers' specific analysis of how oppression operates, and an assumption about which classes or other groups constitute those who are most dominated or oppressed.³⁷

The central debate within oppositional politics in South Africa, simplistically put, is a debate about the necessity of worker-, as opposed to popular alliance-leadership. This has inevitably affected the readership-definition of various popular writing groups. Whereas some groups (such as "Learn and Teach" magazine and, in a rural context, the EDA-productions) have a broader "popular" focus, based on conceptions of "people's history", others see a "worker education" focus as central to their production (e.g. Ilrig, and the now defunct Labour History Group).

It must be emphasised though, that no clear-cut division exists between these two directions, as many overlaps occur. People's History attempts to research, inform and educate around broader historical and social issues of vital importance to the subordinate classes. Worker education instead has a more specific "worker issue" related focus. Yet this focus inevitably needs to relate to the broader framework of people's history, as many worker issues are deeply embedded within it.

These different, broad currents within popular writing activity, provide no concrete concept of "defined readership" though. Both the terms "people" and "workers" are problematic due to their vagueness. As Callinicos points out:

In South Africa, where our colonial heritage has emphasised ethnic and racial differences and is overlaid with the class cleavages distorted by the rapid development of capitalism, the concept of "the people" is indeed problematic. While..."the people" are 'always majoritarian', the notion is also mystificatory, lumping together artisans and tradesmen, proletarians and peasants...³⁸

Similarly, the notion of the "working class" as the target-readership is too broad to be of any concrete use to the practical "focussing" of popular writing production. The South African working class can in no way be understood as a monolithic group. Deep divisions exist, not only between white and black workers, but within the black working class itself divisions have been occasioned by oppressive political forces:

...we have the mass of the productive workers - urban black proletarians, migrants and rural workers - who in themselves are divided by pass regulations, Section 10 rights and differential job definitions, which in turn emphasise ethnic and cultural differences as well as differential locations in the points of production.³⁹

Though the tradition of struggle and resistance to oppressive governing structures, does provide strong links between different groups of the working class, the abovementioned divisions are of great significance and cannot be ignored. The concept of "the working class" as "the readership" is not sufficiently clear and concrete. It immediately raises questions such as, inter alia, "Which group within the working class?", "Specifically whose needs and interests demand focus?", and "How representative is that focus?"

It seems inevitable that the specific target-readership of popular writing producers must be defined more closely so that the materials produced can have a realistic and successful focus - and actually reach the intended readership. A narrow, more specifically defined readership focus is not unproblematic though.

The most obvious avenue to establishing that focus, and with it direct producer/reader interaction, is for the producers to establish a direct relationship with a particular community or worker organisation. This would indeed ensure that the producers have a clear conception of reader needs and interests, and that the materials produced are specifically aimed at those needs. (Examples of this are the Ilrig "Africa-books", specifically produced due to trade-union requests, and publications such as Griessel's "Sibambene").

Such a relationship carries many problematic implications with it though, some of which already have been elaborated upon in chapter 2.2. A direct working relationship between producers and a particular organisation can develop negative features if too much power and control over the definition of "production-focus" rests in the hands of either party.

In this sense, the demand for accountability to the organisation can be restrictive if uncritical adherence to the "organisation-line" is expected, not permitting the materials produced to express critical attitudes of potentially great importance to organisation development.

On the other hand, if the producers insist on too great an autonomy, the views, experiences and interpretations of the organisation members could become subjugated to a producer-perspective. This would lead to the imposition of the theoretical knowledge held by the intellectual/producer, on the practical consciousness of the organisation members, rather than a productive "union" between them (as outlined in chapter 2.2).

A further problem inherent in a narrow, specific definition of readership is the tension existing between such a definition, and the aim of popular writing materials to emphasise the "communication value" of knowledge. As was discussed in chapter 2.1, the aim of democratising knowledge production attempts to characterise knowledge as a relationship between people. Popular writing materials thus potentially "play a very special role in the historical

transmission of accumulated experiences..." (see footnote 11). In this sense popular writing attempts to be relevant to a large section of the population - recording collective experience, and thereby linking into a "collective consciousness".

It is questionable to what extent materials which have been produced for a very specific readership can fulfill that aim. A "tension-cycle" is thus created. On the one hand, it is important for the producers to define a specific readership, so that direct, real contact between readers and producers can be established. Without that contact no vital, dynamic relationship can develop between them, a relationship essential for the democratisation process of knowledge production. Without that contact the producers would aim their materials into a hazy space, defined entirely by their abstract conception of the "subordinate" and "oppressed" as "the readership".

On the other hand, a too specific and narrow readership-focus could be too restrictive due to limiting accountability-structures. Furthermore, it could limit the potential of the materials to record and reflect on "accumulated experiences, struggles and ideas" (see footnote 11), thereby achieving relevance and meaning to a broader audience, existing outside the perimeters of a specific readership-group.

Materials produced for a specific organisation could become too subjected to the immediate strategic needs of that group. Consequently, the educational potential of popular materials, which would inevitably contain a "long-term", rather than a purely immediate focus of what is relevant and important, would be discarded in favour of a strong propagandistic element, in the tradition of "Agit-Prop"⁴⁰.

Clearly, it could be argued that both the educational and the "agitational" are important functions of popular writing. It has been emphasised in the introduction however, that the educational purpose of popular writing is the central concern of this analysis. Furthermore, it is

questionable to what extent the production of agitational materials can call the dominant producer-role (an integral part of traditional knowledge-production) into question, and establish a creative alternative.

An attempt to solve the problems inherent in the definition of a specific readership can only be undertaken if a successful compromise is established between the terms of the producers and those of the readers/users. This leads back to the various models of sociological intervention discussed in chapter 2.2.

The democratisation of knowledge-production can only be initiated if the terms of both "parties" are given an equal status within the production process. As emphasised by Muller and Cloete, a creative union of "erudite" and "local" knowledge, an innovative inclusion of both the producers and the readers/users in the production process, can only come about if the interaction is no longer "simply conditional upon the knowledge of the academic, or upon his or her initiative" (see footnote 35).

It is clear that the successful establishment of such "knowledge-dynamics" within the popular writing process is an extremely complex task, a complexity which is aggravated by the reality that the actual production resources of time, materials and research skills are firmly in the control of the producers/intellectuals.

Popular materials which are aiming to relate to particular organisational structures such as trade-unions or community organisations must battle with another problem of readership definition: the "level", or the educational and organisational level, of the readers/users.

The inadequate education-structures in South Africa have created a vast number of functionally illiterate people amongst the working and subordinate classes. The mass membership of most oppositional organisations is therefore characterised by an extremely low level of literacy

skills. This makes it difficult for many to relate successfully to even the most simplistic of written materials.

Consequently the majority of popular materials reaches the more educated organisation members. As popular writing groups such as "Ilig", the "Labour History Group" and the producers of "Fosatu Worker News" have realised, it is mostly the more educated, active organisation members, and those involved in more or less structured organisation- education programmes who show sufficient interest in the production and reading/use of educational popular materials. The authors of "Fosatu Worker News" point out:

...the language...still remains beyond the reach of many workers. This is true of many workers less accustomed to reading, and the length of each serial is too daunting. The serial is therefore directed principally at the more literate factory floor leadership, with the commitment and interest to spend time absorbing the contents of the articles and who can impart the knowledge so gained to fellow workers in meetings and discussions.⁴¹

In this sense, the "more literate factory floor leadership" takes on a very interesting role. They potentially become the "mediators"⁴², between the knowledge provided by the popular materials, and the majority of members who cannot directly relate to those materials due to a lack of literacy skills.

If productive contact between the educated leadership and the majority of organisation members does exist, it potentially holds innovative and exciting implications for popular writing production.

These "mediators" could essentially create a very important link between the intellectuals producing written materials and the large majority of mostly uneducated workers and "people", whose experiential knowledge is a core-focus of popular writing. The "mediators" could act as "translators" of perspectives and experiences to overcome the isolating divide existent between the intellectuals and the majority - a divide due to the reality of cultural and educational differences.

In this sense the role of the “mediators” can be closely identified with that of “organic intellectuals” as defined by Gramsci (see chapter 2.2), their function being that of “directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong” through “actively participating in practical life, as constructor, organiser.” (see footnotes 22 and 23).

The potential of this “mediator-model” to contribute significantly to the process of democratising knowledge structures within popular writing, depends on the extent to which these “mediators” can be actively included in the actual production process of the written materials i.e. the extent to which they have active contact to the intellectuals involved in that production process.

Furthermore that potential depends on the dynamics and nature of the “mediating-process” occurring between the “organic intellectuals” and the mass membership. A thorough investigation of these dynamics goes beyond the scope of this analysis. Nonetheless, the potential for the democratising of knowledge production, inherent in this “mediating-process”, must be emphasised.

It is thus clear that the definition of readership within popular writing is both a very important, and a highly complex task. The role of the readership, inextricably linked to the role of the producers, highlights many of the tensions and problems contained in the aim of democratising knowledge structures and the process of knowledge production.

It is important to have a further look at those tensions, in order to establish a better understanding of the realisable potential of popular writing purpose.

2.4 CONCLUDING THE THEORETICAL DEBATE: HIGHLIGHTING THE TENSIONS AND PROBLEMS

The various dimensions of popular writing purpose have been explored in the previous chapters. The core aim of the production of popular materials can be summarised as follows. Firstly, to “popularise” knowledge (primarily theoretical knowledge, based on academic research processes), in that it is made accessible to a far broader and diverse audience, than the closely defined “peer-” and “expert-” focus of traditional knowledge production allows for.

Secondly, to “democratise” the structures and processes of knowledge production, to enable broader participation of hitherto excluded groups and classes in those processes.

The latter is clearly the more complex aim. It is based on the necessity of significantly “moving away” from, or “disestablishing”, the structures of traditional knowledge production. The problems inherent in that necessity have been outlined previously. The various models of sociological intervention, examined in chapter 2.2, are all examples of more or less successful avenues, initiating the process of democratisation. Each one is hampered by serious problems though. These problems are primarily rooted in the relationship which exists between the producers and the readers/users of popular writing.

The position of the knowledge producers/writers within traditional knowledge production is one of dominance. Their terms are of central and dominant importance to the production process. They have ultimate control over the definition and validation of knowledge, putting paramount emphasis on the “integrity” of research and the “truth”-value of the knowledge established from it: “not power nor God, but truth validated academic practice.”⁴³

No dynamic, vital relationship exists between these producers and their subject of research, as the latter is mostly held at an "objective" distance to enable its theoretical investigation. The audience/readership is almost exclusively sought amongst academic peers. This ensures that any knowledge exchange and debate remains in the hands of experts, their skills remaining "shrouded" from a broader audience. These processes form the basis of what Gramsci has termed the "caste" or "priesthood" of traditional intellectuals (see footnote 19).

The purpose of popular writing necessitates a significant shift away from these processes. As was examined in chapter 2.1, popular writing aims to create space for the "self-representation" of the experiential knowledge of the marginalised and subordinate groups and classes. This can only occur, if direct and vital contact exists between the producers/writers and those groups - which are at once the central subject of research, and the perceived readers/users of the popular materials.

This contact essentially holds the potential for a significant process of democratic knowledge production to take place within the parameters of popular writing. For this process to be initiated, the role of the producers must shift from one of dominance to one of anti-hierarchical interaction with the readers/users (see footnote 35). Theoretical knowledge (owned by the producers) and practical knowledge (owned by the readers/users) must find a productive and dynamic union to produce critical consciousness. This union can only occur if the terms of both producers and readers carry equal status within the production process.

Several serious hurdles have to be overcome to achieve that "union". As has been stated previously, the skills and resources necessary for the research and production of written materials are mostly in the control of the producers. A serious commitment to sharing rather than "shrouding" those skills is necessary to erode the position of "producer-dominance" in the

production process. To what extent that is possible within the production of written materials (especially as the largest proportion of readership only has very basic literacy skills) needs to be investigated.

Furthermore, the producers are mostly rooted within a different cultural environment to that of the readership, and are thus largely isolated from the cultural experiences of the readers/users, with all that this isolation implies.

This isolating divide, as well as the problems caused by the extremely low level of literacy amongst the largest proportion of the readers (which makes a truly anti-hierarchical producer/reader contact for written production very difficult), could potentially be overcome by the “mediator-model” illustrated in chapter 2.3. This would entail that producer/reader contact primarily occurs between the writers of popular materials and the “organic intellectuals” of community and labour organisations. The organic intellectuals would function as “mediators” between the writers and the mass of potential readers, “bridging” the divide between them. The potential of this “model” needs to be thoroughly investigated in the practical, “real-life” arena, an environment where popular materials are actually being used.

A further problem inherent in the relationship between producers and readers is the question of accountability. If producers have a close working relationship with a specific organisation, the immediate strategic needs of the organisation could negatively erode the producers’ terms. As illustrated in chapter 2.3, this would result in the popular materials reflecting the organisational line, aiming to be primarily agitational.

The debate amongst popular writers about the extent to which their materials should reflect an organisational line, has, as yet, found no specific answers. It seems inevitable though, that a strong agitational element will erode the educational potential of those materials. As soon as critical perspectives become curbed in favour of “a line”, knowledge becomes

trivialised. It is questionable to what extent a truly critical consciousness can be initiated by such trivialised knowledge.

Popular materials must have a central educational aim to establish that consciousness. The materials must be based on thorough research-processes, so that the readers can have access to well-researched information, presenting a variety of perspectives. These processes leave no room for the trivialising of knowledge.

As has been mentioned earlier (chapter 2.1), the intention of establishing critical consciousness in popular writing, often aims at enabling the readership/users to challenge and transform the oppressive social structures dominating them. Particularly popular materials containing a strong agitational thrust see that aim as central to their production. The focus on transformation within popular writing is both controversial and complex. It is questionable to what extent any written materials can lead to direct, practical action. As Hegel has stated:

...the freedom that results when the bondsman realises that he has a mind of his own is only the most abstract and empty type of freedom. It is not yet concrete freedom and can arise in a world in which nothing has substantially changed.⁴⁴

In his book "Theory and Practice"⁴⁵, Habermas strongly contends the notion that critical theory leads not only to the development of critical consciousness, but also to transforming action. Transformed, changed consciousness does not automatically lead to effective political action⁴⁶. Many other processes have to intervene to initiate that action, processes which exist in the realm of practical life rather than written materials and theory.

This analysis has attempted to highlight some of the central tensions inherent in the process of popular writing. It has primarily concentrated on the problems arising from the aim of “disestablishing” traditional channels of knowledge production, and of establishing an innovative, democratic alternative to that tradition.

It must nonetheless be emphasised once again, that the subject of this analysis, “popular writing”, must be seen as work in progress. Its parameters are not static, but are dynamic, alive and ever-changing. The problems and tensions investigated are thus not seen as insurmountable hurdles, but as challenges to a creative process, which plays a very important role within the social, political and educational structures of present-day South Africa.

These challenges can only be seen in appropriate perspective once popular writing production has been investigated within the practical arena. This investigation will be undertaken in the following chapter. The “practical arena” chosen for analysis is the “International Labour Research and Information Group” (Ilrig) - a casestudy of popular writing production.

CHAPTER 3

THE CASE STUDY: THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION GROUP (ILRIG)

INTRODUCTION

The previous section of this analysis has focussed on the theoretical issues, questions, tensions and debate which characterise popular writing activity in this country. It now becomes necessary to investigate these issues on the "platform" of actual production, where theory and practice constantly merge and clash, and where their co-existence is characterised by dynamic tension.

The following chapter therefore intends to investigate the "International Labour Research and Information Group" (Ilrig) as a case study of popular writing production in South Africa. Ilrig was chosen as an appropriate arena for research in this field, as the group's contribution to popular writing - both in terms of production and debate - has been an important and varied one.

The production of Ilrig materials - books, pamphlets, posters, audio-visuals - has been characterised by ongoing self-critique, elaborate and complex communal editing and continual debate about relevant production-input and direction. Popular writing materials produced by Ilrig are thus an important practical example of popular book production - an example of the practical process (and this is a term of great importance for the group's production) which needs to be analysed, to provide a practical framework for the theoretical investigation undertaken in chapter 2.

It must be emphasised, that this analysis focuses on Ilrig as producers of popular writing. It is thus not a holistic investigation of all the working mechanisms of Ilrig, but rather attempts to analyse and illuminate the important aspects which form part of the group's popular writing activity.

Before a critical analysis of Ilrig-production can be undertaken, it is necessary to create a brief overview of the group's history and origin, as well as its basic production structure (chapter 3.1). This will largely take the form of an Ilrig "self-portrait" - based on interviews conducted with group members, and material provided by Ilrig evaluation surveys and annual reports. The main purpose of this portrait is briefly to illustrate the main developments which have characterised Ilrig's book-production during the first "two phases" of the group's work. This is necessary to gain a better understanding of Ilrig's popular writing activity. At the end of this section, an attempt will be made to highlight the central problems of Ilrig's production.

A critical analysis of Ilrig's popular writing activity follows, relating the practical issues more directly to the theoretical debate (chapter 3.2). The analysis will be linked to two concrete examples of Ilrig's book production in chapter 3.3 - examples which inevitably reflect the primary aims of that process, and the central problems inherent therein.

It must be emphasised right from the outset that this is an analysis of "work in progress". It is thus an artificially static portrayal of a process, which has already moved beyond the boundaries of this investigation. The demands and needs of "practical life" on a group such as Ilrig, make for a fluidity which is difficult to capture within an academic analysis. But despite the continually shifting parameters of the process, the problems analysed remain relevant and central thereto.

3.1 ILRIG - AN OVERVIEW

The "International Labour Research and Information Group" was founded in mid-1983 by a group of university trained and based intellectuals. The mission statement formulated by the group reads as follows:

...to provide research, information and educational materials on international labour issues to independent trade unions, community and educational organisations in South Africa.¹

The group's initial focus was thus the provision of educational input (in the form of materials, workshops and seminars) for organisations expressing a need for it. The information provided would primarily be gained from academic research, and made available to a non-academic user-spectrum. Dave Cooper, a founder-member of Ilrig, briefly described the origins of this focus:

I had done extensive research into international labour issues both for academic papers and a course I was teaching in the Sociology department. Feed-back and information I had gained from sources outside the university made me realise that all this information and research was significant to a much larger audience than the university peers and students it was primarily directed at. Contact to "popular writers" such as the "Labour History Group" encouraged the idea of "popularising" this research, i.e. to make it accessible to non-specialists outside of the university, who are in need of educational material and information. (Ilrig-interview)

The idea had thus crystallised that the knowledge production generated for the Sociology course, both in terms of teaching activity and written materials, could be meaningful and useful to a far wider user spectrum than the academic scholars who had hitherto been the exclusive consumers.

"Popularization" was seen as the appropriate mode to make specialist academic knowledge/information accessible for a new, far wider and more varied audience.

Naturally this “new” focus had not come about in isolation. As has been shown in Chapter 1, the increasingly rapid growth in innovative theory and action in the field of historical research, as well as the renewed interest in labour history and worker education (due largely to the resurgence of the independent, non-racial unions since the early 1970s), contributed strongly to the climate of “outreach”, of moving away from academic exclusivity and isolation - the climate within which Ilrig was founded.

The initial roots of Ilrig were thus established by a group of university-based intellectuals whose focus had been directed away from exclusive academic production, towards the aim and intention of producing materials and of providing well-researched information for non-specialist, non-academic users. The initial aim was therefore to “empower” these users/readers through making hitherto inaccessible research and information available to them.

Right from the outset, an exact “audience” or readership definition proved difficult for Ilrig. The group’s most immediate focus was the independent trade unions, as they formed a strong, coherent organisational framework, with apparently more clearly and closely defined homogeneous needs, than the varied community and educational organisations in South Africa. The initial responses and feed-back given by trade union leadership to educational contact- and material-proposals made by Ilrig were positive, but non-committal. As a member of Ilrig expressed it:

Our ideas received positive feed-back. Most of the trade union offices approached showed great interest in our proposals, as the need for such material was and is enormous. We were assured of receiving support wherever it was necessary, but none of the unions were able to become directly involved in our project due to lack of time and human resources. (Ilrig-interview)

The Ilrig-members interpreted this feed-back as a positive indication that their materials would not aim at a "user-vacuum", but were indeed directed at areas of real educational need. It was clear though, that it would be difficult to establish the exact nature of that need. Close and continuous contact to a trade union audience/readership was necessary for this, but would be very difficult to establish and maintain, as pressing everyday needs and demands did not allow for educational projects to be on the "high-priority list" of union "time-agendas".

Too close a trade union focus could be problematic in itself though, as it was questionable to what extent trade union-directed materials could be sufficiently appropriate for a broader readership such as community and educational organisations.

Very soon Ilrig began to realise that its geographical location further aggravated the problem of reader/user contact (and thus focus and definition). Real and concrete readership contact was very important, if the materials produced by Ilrig were to have a realistic and appropriate focus. But it was difficult to establish that contact from the distant university location held by Ilrig.

Although entirely autonomous in its decision-making processes and production, the group had been linked (from its outset) to the Sociology Department at UCT. Until the end of 1987 Ilrig's offices were exclusively located on the campus. This had a variety of advantages for the group, as well as for the University: Ilrig had efficient access to research and information resources available at the University, and the relative security of "safe" office space within the university's perimeter - safe from harassment by state security forces. The university in turn (and more specifically the Sociology Department), enjoyed, (and enjoys), the advantage of housing a project which can be added to its often debated and theoretically endorsed "outreach

programme”, in order to bridge the isolation of university activity from the majority community.

This geographical location also had major disadvantages for Ilrig: it meant both a geographical isolation (easy access is not possible for members of the community who are not campus-based), and a “perception-isolation” - Ilrig was often too closely associated with the university as an institution and therefore regarded as too interventionist, too academic, too removed, and too isolated.

These disadvantages increased the sense of urgency within the group, to move away from the university location in order to have a clearer, more public, independent identity. Ilrig saw it as vitally important that increased efforts were made to establish contact on various levels with the actual users of the group’s productions.

A good opportunity arose in early 1987, when office space became available in “Community House” - a centre for trade union and community organisations in Salt River, Cape Town.

In late 1987, Ilrig moved its entire resource centre and office equipment into Community House, but ensured continued use of university premises for research purposes. This was an important move, as it indicated Ilrig’s serious commitment to become involved in an off-campus working space. Furthermore, it carried with it the real potential for increased contact with groups utilising Ilrig-materials.

The last two years of “Ilrig-presence” in Community House have indeed shown clear evidence of increased contact between the group and organisations utilising Ilrig-production. This is particularly true of Cosatu who have increasingly approached Ilrig with specific requests for written materials and seminar courses.

The Ilrig move and all its implications tell an important tale about the relationship of the group both to the university, and particularly to the users of its productions. A closer analysis of this relationship can only be performed however, after a more detailed account of Ilrig production and activity.

The Ilrig project report, drawn up in mid-1987, summarised the group's main activities as follows:

1. The research and self-publication of educational materials on international labour issues.
2. The establishment of a resource centre containing local and international documentation on these issues.
3. The provision of a research and information service available to progressive organisations.
4. The provision of educational and training courses to trade unionists and others on international labour issues.
5. The establishment and maintenance of links with similar projects in other countries.
6. Collaboration with other progressive organisations in South Africa in the spheres of
 - (a) popular writing,
 - (b) popular economic research, and
 - (c) publications distribution.²

This overview essentially summarises the most vital currents of Ilrig development until mid-1987. But a more detailed look at these "currents" is necessary, to gain a better understanding of Ilrig's focus and activities.

The portrayal of Ilrig-activity will largely have to restrict itself to what the group has called its first "two phases" of production - namely, 1983-1985; and 1985-1987. Severe time-limitations have made a thorough investigation of the more recent Ilrig-work impossible. The first "two phases" will be portrayed more or less chronologically to illustrate clear stages of development within Ilrig. It must be emphasised once again, that it is specifically the group's popular writing activity which is the focus of this overview. The illustration of "Ilrig-development" will thus solely concentrate on that activity and its most significant aspects - namely the production-focus and concept of readership, rather than other areas of Ilrig-work.

During the first two years of Ilrig-activity, the group worked at establishing its aim and reputation as a service organisation providing research, information and educational materials on International Labour issues to progressive South African trade union, community and educational organisations.

The development of links with user groups, the production of the first four popular booklets in “easy English” and the establishment of a resource centre were the most significant stepping stones in Ilrig’s early development. Apart from its research, information and consultation activity in the field of International Labour issues, the group also set up a structure for educational courses offered to interested organisations.

As has been mentioned above, during this “first phase” Ilrig’s popular writing activity focussed on the production of four publications, which formed part of a series named “Workers of the World”: (1) “Botswana - the story of mineworkers in an independent African country”; (2) “Bolivia - the unfinished struggle”; (3) “Brazil - a worker’s story”; and (4) “Solidarity of Labour - the story of International Trade Union Organisations”.

Important decisions which had to be formulated during the “first phase” were related to the book-format, style and appearance. Right from the outset Ilrig was committed to producing good quality for its worker-readership.

Right from the start it was important for us to produce materials of good quality. This did not only apply to the research necessary for the books, but also to the appearance of the books, such as print, illustrations, paper etc. (Ilrig-interview)

The importance of “book-quality” will be discussed further in chapter 3.3. Suffice it here to say, that the Ilrig commitment to high-quality research and materials clearly had important implications for the production-process - not the least of which was the time-factor: the initial planned output of ten booklets (!) in the first year, was changed to four books in the first three years!

These books were broadly aimed at a “trade union readership” and were distributed to and purchased by unions, and various community and educational organisations.

This first production phase was marked by intensive debate within the group about the actual meaning and implication of “popularising” research. Ilrig’s initial naivete about popular writing-production was illustrated by the group’s intention of producing ten booklets a year. The act of “popularising” was at first seen merely in terms of “simplifying” academic thought and language, to make appropriate research more accessible to a broad, non-academic, non-specialist audience/readership. As mentioned above, the central aim was to “empower” the readership through that process.

But the question of readership, and particularly the relationship between producers and users/readers, had not been sufficiently problematised. As a member of Ilrig remarked:

In the early books the concept of readership was very abstract. The conceptualisation of contents, language, style AND readership solely lay in the hands of the Ilrig-writers. (Ilrig-interview)

The books were thus being produced by a group of university-trained/-based intellectuals with little “real”, concrete contact to the perceived “trade union readership”. It was the producers’ idea of “popularising” and “accessibility” which was reflected in the books rather than concrete reader-needs or interests. The level of readership at which the books were broadly aiming, was the “rank-and-file” membership within the unions. But very little was known about the actual literacy-levels and interest/need spheres of that membership .

Furthermore, the concept of “empowerment” was a vague term, which had not been considered critically enough. Could mere access to research and information really lead to an awareness which was empowering? Or did other, more complex processes have to occur for the realisation of that aim?

Had the role of the readers/users during the first production phase not been far too passive to have affected, or “empowered”, their consciousness?

Towards the end of the first production “phase”, Ilrig became increasingly aware of the necessity to evaluate its materials, in the hope of gaining some answers to these questions. It appeared particularly important to contact as many user/reader-groups as possible, in an attempt to gain some feedback and knowledge about the extent to which the books were being used, the way they were being utilised and the degree to which they met reader needs and interests.

In early 1985 Ilrig conducted its first evaluation survey amongst the largest user-groups of Ilrig-productions, namely some trade union organisations. Evaluation questionnaires and interviews conducted by the group created channels for reader feedback about the usefulness, quality, level and focus of Ilrig materials. Furthermore, important information was gained about the level and direction of worker education within various trade unions.

Feedback was received from sixteen different unions, as well as one federation³. The Ilrig-books had been utilised in different ways and situations by these unions: for individual reading, as basic material for education-workshops, and reading- and discussion-resources for “reading-groups”. A brief illustration of the survey will be undertaken here, though a thorough analysis of its implications can only happen in the following chapters.

The feedback gained was positive and encouraging for Ilrig, but at the same time it served to highlight tensions and contradictions within the field of readership. The overall response given was positive in that it indicated that the Ilrig-books had served as useful materials, realistically meeting the needs and direction of worker education programmes within the trade unions. The books had thus not been aimed at a vacuum, but had in fact been utilised by groups which fitted into Ilrig’s perception of “target-readership”.

The survey-response further indicated though, that the exact practical nature and needs of that readership were problematic. The concept "trade union readership" was a complex term, which incorporated many different levels and dimensions. Even if the general direction of trade union education programmes had been met adequately by Ilrig materials, many divergent opinions were given about the necessary level (in terms of language and content) of the publications, the issue of translations, the format and price of the books, as well as the focus of future publications.

To summarise, the feedback given by various trade union organisers and members suggested

- i) The Ilrig-productions did not exist in an isolated vacuum. The information provided by the above-mentioned books as well as more concise materials such as "The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua" had been utilised within the education structures of some trade unions and had been found useful.
- ii) The perception Ilrig had had of readership and users of the books was far too simplistic and one-dimensional. The clearest message received from the survey was the reality of a vastly divergent readership. It became clear that the concept of "book-users", and the relationship between the producers of Ilrig-materials and the users of those productions, had to be problematised to a far greater degree: the hitherto- held approach of producing "simply-written books" on particular issues "for a trade union audience", did not meet the complexities of reality.

As a member of Ilrig commented:

The evaluation survey was very important to us as it clearly reflected the broad spectrum of opinion which exists amongst various trade unions and different individuals with regard to target readership, language level, contents and focus of "popularly written" educational materials such as ours.

It furthermore was very important, as it enabled closer contact between Ilrig and the user-groups of Ilrig-productions. This contact was vital to establish some form of feedback structure linking producers and users of Ilrig materials - a feedback structure to provide input about needs for materials as well as reasons for success or failure of previous productions. But most importantly, this feedback structure had to be established and built up in the future, so that the readers could begin playing a more active part in the production process. (Ilrig-interview)

Questions such as level of language and contents, depth of information, format and presentation had to be considered far more carefully in relation to the actual readership: who was that readership - shop stewards, organisers, or rank-and-file members? What level of education could be assumed? How were the books read and utilised? To what extent could the written materials respond to specific union requests without becoming too parochial in terms of issues, interest and time-scale? And most importantly, how could "real" contact be established between the producers and readers, to make the needs of the target-readership definable and more central to the production process?

Already during the "first phase" of Ilrig production, the question of producer-audience relationship and the issue of target-readership thus became the complex focal-points of Ilrig debate. As was emphasised in the above-quoted Ilrig-interview, it became clear to the Ilrig-producers, that these concepts had to be defined more closely, so that the books could have a more "readership-related" focus.

This focus was vital, if the written materials were to contain the potential for "empowering" reader-consciousness. It had become clear to the Ilrig-writers, that their production-process had to shift significantly from the defined parameters of traditional knowledge production, if this potential was to be achieved. A marked change of the producer-user relationship would have to occur, with the readership and their experience and knowledge taking a far more active part in the production process.

The mere presentation of accessible, simplified theoretical research (which was entirely in the hands of the “experts” i.e. the producers) was only a part of “popularising”. A far more complex dimension lay in the changed role and status of “readership” - as active contributors to the process of knowledge definition and production. Clearly, the heterogeneous nature of even a more closely defined focus such as “trade union readership” made the exact definition of that role and status very difficult.

This debate within Ilrig increased in complexity during the “second phase” of the group’s work (1985-1987), which was an exceptionally important period for the group.

Not only was this phase filled with the research for six new publications, as well as the translation of previous books into four other South African languages, it was also (primarily) characterised by the need to adapt to a rapidly changing environment of organisation focus and requests, due to increased organised resistance to apartheid structures, and increased state repression of, and vigilante action against, popular and labour movements.

The political and social upheaval in South Africa during Ilrig’s “second phase” of development, inevitably meant a change of focus and needs within community and labour movements - a change demanding sufficient flexibility from Ilrig, for an adequate response to these movements.

The question of target-audience became increasingly more pertinent, as a specific readership would inevitably have a decisive effect on the content and level of each publication. Could the books be entirely “trade union” orientated, or would they also have to take expressed needs of populist organisations into account? What were the implications of a specific “trade-union-focus”, and specifically, who were to be the readers and “book-users” within the trade unions?

Further fuel was added to this heated debate within the group, when the first specific publication request was extended to Ilrig in 1985.

As a direct consequence of the evaluation survey, more trade unions had become aware of the Ilrig publications and began channeling specific requests to the group. This process was initiated by the Metal and Allied Workers' Union, or MAWU (now integrated into the National Union of Metalworkers in South Africa). The union expressed the urgent need for information and materials about the labour movements in other African countries, particularly Mozambique, Tanzania, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

A direct result of the MAWU-request was the research for and production of the first four books within the "Africa-series": 1) "Mozambique - Aluta Continua"; 2) "Tanzania - The Struggle for Ujamaa"; 3) "Kenya - The Fire and the Ashes"; and 4) "Zimbabwe".

These publications essentially formed the major production "output" during Ilrig's "second phase" (partly spilling over into the "third phase"). Apart from continuous teaching activity (running seminars and workshop) and production of materials such as posters, articles and short newsletter-type publications, Ilrig directed a major part of its "production-energy" into the "Africa-series".

Many central problems within Ilrig's popular writing activity were highlighted during this production process. The nature of the request, the problem of publications which could lose their "universal" appropriateness (see chapter 2.3) to too parochial a readership focus, and the need and difficulty of establishing useful feedback-channels between Ilrig-producers and MAWU-readership, were but a few of the problems which formed the focus of heated Ilrig-debate during frequent communal editing sessions.

It became clear to Ilrig that the written materials had to be based on a tighter definition of readership-level. This definition would inevitably have an important effect on the focus, content, language and format of the books. This definition could only be effectively formulated though, once real,

concrete contact had been established between the producers and the readers/users.

The direct interaction with MAWU (which will be analysed in the following chapters), linked to the production of the four Africa-books, was thus an important stage in the development of Ilrig's popular writing activity. The problems of readership-definition and the relationship between producers and readers/users, which had already existed during the "first phase" of production, were emphasised still more prominently during the "second phase".

The Ilrig-producers had realised increasingly, that the readers had to be included more actively in the production process of the books.

The direct interaction with MAWU showed us, that it was possible to establish concrete contact to a "user-group", even though many difficulties had to be confronted. The MAWU contact certainly made it possible to include the book-users more directly in the production process - an important step away from our initial writing-approach, which was entirely dominated by the Ilrig-producers. (Ilrig-interview)

The position of the Ilrig-producers had undergone a marked change. Their initial conception of "popularising" research and information had changed, from the simplistic notion of "simplifying theoretical knowledge" (a notion which allowed for the idea of "ten booklets in one year!"), to a far more complex understanding of the popular writing process: issues such as the role of the producers and readers within the production-process, the definition of readership and its inevitable effect on the book-focus, producer-reader contact and others, had increasingly become a central focus of the Ilrig production-debate.

A closer analysis of the purpose of Ilrig-productions, and particularly the roles played by the producers and readers/users within that production, is necessary to gain a better understanding of that debate.

This brief overview of Ilrig's popular writing activity and its most important developments has attempted to touch on the central problems inherent in Ilrig's popular writing production. A knowledge and understanding of those problems is necessary in order to develop a full understanding of Ilrig's production, and, particularly, the potential of achieving its central aim: to empower the worker-readership, 1) by the provision of hitherto inaccessible research and information, and 2) by including the readership in the production process (which clearly would have to explode the parameters of traditional knowledge production) - thus injecting an entirely different status into "worker knowledge" and their ability to contribute to and participate in knowledge production.

The next chapter will attempt to relate Ilrig's popular writing activity more closely to the theoretical debate undertaken in chapter 2. It is hoped that this will enable a better understanding of the tensions and problems inherent in the practical production process as well as its potential of fulfilling its (above-stated) aim.

3.2 ILRIG'S POPULAR WRITING PRODUCTION : AN ANALYSIS

3.2.1 THE PURPOSE

Before the central problems, tensions and potential inherent in Ilrig's popular production can be analysed, it is necessary briefly to crystallise the purpose and aim of that production. The overview of purpose (provided in the previous chapter) must thus be expanded upon, as the expressed aim of the Ilrig-production is inextricably linked to the roles the producers and readers/users play within it. The analysis of those roles will be the major focus of chapter 3.2, as the primary tensions, and the potential of achieving the production aim, are part and parcel of them.

As has been stated by various Ilrig-members (during interviews conducted with them), the group had chosen the "arena" of "international labour issues" to make well-researched information and education-resources accessible and available primarily to the organisers and members of independent trade unions. This "arena" was chosen to inform workers about primary issues and tensions within the field - information, which aimed to expand perceptions about (local) national labour issues, and developments within the (local) national working class struggle.

The worker struggle and labour movement developments in other countries portrayed in the Ilrig-books, thus aimed to reflect on processes which are relevant to labour developments in South Africa. In this way, the Ilrig producers hoped to provide a useful and informative educational framework within which to raise critical discussion and debate about the position and direction of the labour movement in South Africa. Incorporated in this production purpose was therefore the aim of educating through what Brecht has termed the "Verfremdungseffekt" (alienation technique): the

conscientising of the reader about the social, economic and political realities determining her/his immediate environment, through the screen of similar realities occurring in a distant geographical, or historical, environment.

The initial aim of Ilrig production can, once again, be summarised as follows: to empower the readers, in other words, to raise their consciousness through making hitherto inaccessible information-perspectives, and thorough research, available to them. The information-focus chosen by Ilrig is the arena of international labour issues and relations. The aim of informing about these issues inevitably brings with it the necessity of educating about broader theoretical concepts of social and economic structures. The information presented has to be thorough and well researched, in order to be meaningful and useful for dissemination and consumption at popular level.

It is clear, that expert knowledge is necessary to research and present such information adequately. This means that a major element of the production process - namely research for and decision making about pertinent and relevant information - lies firmly in the hands of the knowledge-experts i.e. the Ilrig-producers.

During interviews conducted with the Ilrig-members, it became clear that Ilrig does not underestimate the importance of providing well-researched and well substantiated materials to its worker-readership. The emphasis on quality of production does not only focus on the lay-out, print and appearance of the books, but primarily on the contents.

It is necessary for the Ilrig-writers to have a serious self-image as researchers - not as academics in a narrow sense, but as producers of well-researched, in-depth knowledge. It is vital to continually keep abreast with new developments, to gain new perspectives, to get "on top" of the material in question. (Ilrig-interview)

The emphasis on quality and thorough research within Ilrig-purpose has many implications: the writers must have expert-knowledge of the field, the writing- and production-process cannot be rushed, but needs adequate time-input, and the information provided cannot be trivialised to follow a simplistic "line", but has to incorporate various perspectives. These implications will be thoroughly investigated in the following chapters.

The initial purpose of the Ilrig-productions therefore envisages the "empowerment" of the readership in that relevant knowledge is made accessible to the readers by the "knowledge-experts", the Ilrig writers. But as has been illustrated in chapter 3.1, the group's perception of purpose undertakes an important shift during the production of the first four Ilrig-books: the Ilrig-writers become increasingly more aware that the readership is too passive and too anonymous an element in the production process.

It is questionable to what extent reader-consciousness can be "empowered", if the readership does not become a more "real" element in the production process, if actual reader-perceptions and needs are not taken into account. The "shift" in production purpose thus demands that the Ilrig-books have to move beyond the aim of making thorough research accessible to its readership. Instead, the information formulated through the research-processes undertaken by the producers, has to be related to, and merged with an entirely different knowledge-source: the social perceptions and reality, past and present, of the South African working class. Towards the end of the first "production-phase", the Ilrig-writers have defined an important new focus:

Part of our work is imparting through the books a new definition of knowledge which the workers have gained through their *own* experience, *own* struggle. (Ilrig - interview)

An important change has to occur at this point within Ilrig's popular writing activity - a change from a book-production process, concerned with creating access routes to a body of knowledge firmly defined and controlled by academic experts, to a process where the incorporation of a different kind of knowledge becomes a central focus: the experiential knowledge and practical consciousness of the worker-readership.

In this sense the necessary shift in Ilrig-purpose directly reflects the theoretical debate illustrated in chapter 2: the expert knowledge of the producers has to be merged with the experiential knowledge of the perceived readership, in order to create a productive "union" of erudite and practical knowledge. Within that union lies the potential

1) of providing effective space for the self-representation of reader-perceptions; and

2) of "balancing" and complementing those perceptions, by injecting theoretically informed, broader perspectives into the text.

A far more effective "arena" for the "empowerment" of the readership is thus created: The readers are not only "fed" with accessible information which is perceived as important by the producers/writers. Instead, the actual needs and interests of the readers, and as their experiential knowledge and perspectives become a core-focus of the book-production.

This creates a more realistic potential for the expertise and theoretical insights of the producers to interact effectively with reader-reality - a potential for readers to gain analytical insight into their social, political and economic environment through knowledge-channels which have hitherto been inaccessible to them.

Inevitably, this reflection on Ilrig purpose immediately raises many pertinent questions. To what extent can the Ilrig-books achieve this purpose? What implications does the perception of purpose hold for the roles of the producers and the readership? To what extent must and can these roles shift

from their traditional moulds to realise the purpose? Can real, productive contact between producers and readers be effectively established?

It is clear that the potential of realising the purpose of the Ilrig-production is inextricably linked to the roles the producers and the readership play within that production. It now becomes necessary to analyse those roles more thoroughly, to gain a better understanding of the Ilrig-production-process and particularly the inherent potential of realising its aim.

3.2.2 THE ILRIG-PRODUCERS

It has already been emphasised in chapter 2.2, that the roles of producers and readers within popular writing are closely linked. It is thus both artificial and difficult to separate them for the purpose of analysis. This also applies to the Ilrig production-process. Nonetheless, an attempt will be made to analyse the function and role of Ilrig writers/producers and readers/users separately, to gain a clearer understanding of their nature and their potential for change. The following two chapters will thus attempt to incorporate this separate focus, although continual reference will inevitably have to be made between the two roles.

Chapter 3.1 has already stated, that the Ilrig-producers/writers are university-trained/-based intellectuals who are not directly integrated into the social and organisational framework which largely informs and directs their readership. The Ilrig-producers thus fit into the general mould of popular material-writers described in chapter 2.2. As Callinicos has emphasised, the knowledge and skills which are needed to record and situate people's experiences and relate these experiences to important, clarifying theoretical insights, lie firmly in the hands of intellectuals, most of whom are based in the bourgeois institutions of higher education.

As has been shown in the previous chapter, the academic background of the Ilrig-producers equips them effectively to fulfill the initial aim of the Ilrig-books: to provide the readers with well-researched, thorough information about international labour issues. The previously quoted statement made by an Ilrig-member showed clearly that the Ilrig writers must have “ a serious self-image as researchers... as producers of well-researched, in-depth knowledge”.

The emphasis on thorough research and productions of high quality inevitably carries certain “time-implications” with it. The Ilrig-books fall into the category of popular writing with a long-term educational focus, rather than Agit-prop material, which intends to meet immediate strategic needs (see chapter 2.3).

The angle of “correct and accurate information” is most important for our books. The time-factor and the aim involved in providing that kind of information, do not make the books an appropriate tool for pushing a particular political line. Writing for “propaganda” purposes would mean the danger of oversimplifying history and creating the false belief that the lessons taught by history are simple and simplistic. The “Tanzania”-book is a good example of this. It does not attempt to “push” a particular message. The issues involved are truly ambivalent - the book therefore attempts to portray that ambivalence rather than creating a simplistic and therefore inaccurate lesson out of it. (Ilrig-interview)

The aim of “educating” therefore does not allow the Ilrig materials to create “closed” information channels with focussed interventionist intentions. Instead the books aim to stimulate active, critical debate through providing accurate, well-researched information.

The Ilrig-materials attempt to stimulate discussion rather than “giving the line”. This implies that the information provided aims to broaden the knowledge-base of the readers, hence “empowering” them through providing new information, new perspectives. This makes it vital for that information to be well-researched and accurate. The Ilrig aim of educating, distinctly attempts to move away from the banking concept (in Freire’s terms) of education. A simplistic and interventionist “pushing of the line” is thus not desirable. (Ilrig-interview)

Clearly, this production-aim has been entirely defined by the Ilrig-writers. It is their interests, which are presented within it, and they are well-equipped to satisfy them. In this sense, the role of the Ilrig-producers lies firmly embedded within the mould of traditional knowledge-production: the producers are the experts, who ultimately define and control the production-process.

It has been shown though, that the Ilrig-production purpose underwent a significant shift during the first "production-phase". The producers realised that the Ilrig-materials could only effectively reach the readership, if the knowledge-perceptions of the producers were related to the experiential knowledge of the readers. It therefore becomes necessary to inquire to what extent the role of the Ilrig-producers can and must shift from this "traditional mould" to realise the change of aim and purpose within the production-process.

Clearly, real, concrete contact has to be established between the producers and the readers, if the perceptions and needs of the readers are to be effectively included in the production-process.

Writers of popular materials will have to explore ways of generating their materials in conjunction with the groups for which they are intended, so that such groups can play a role in defining what their interests are, and help to ensure that such materials do generate an educative process which is both democratising and liberating.⁴

The establishment of such contact is a difficult and complex task. Firstly, the academic background of the Ilrig-producers, however important for a well-researched theoretical perspective within the books, inevitably creates distance and isolation between the Ilrig-writers and readers. This distance is further aggravated by the social chasm between producers and readership:

The reality of not being a direct part of a worker organisation is further exacerbated by the reality of not mixing socially with the worker-readers. This makes it difficult to have an authentic understanding of the cultural background of our readers - a background which should inform our books continuously. (Ilig-interview)

Secondly, realistic reader-contact can only be established with a closely defined group of readers. This immediately carries with it the difficulties of actually defining such a group, as well as the difficult limitations of such a close definition (see chapter 2.3).

As has been mentioned before, Ilrig established its first direct contact to a specific group of readers/book-users during the production of the "Africa-books". This production was based on a direct request expressed by MAWU. The trade union had emphasised the need for information about labour issues and developments in other African countries.

Contact-channels were established between the Ilrig-producers and MAWU to define the exact needs and interests of the union, so that these needs could directly inform the materials to be produced. These contact-channels primarily took the form of workshops in which MAWU shop stewards and the Ilrig-producers participated.

An analysis of this direct interaction between the Ilrig-producers and a concrete group of readers/book-users highlights many of the tensions inherent in the production-purpose of Ilrig.

Contact between the MAWU-shop stewards and the Ilrig-writers made it possible for the needs and interests of this concrete readership to be included actively in the production-process of the "Africa-books" (this will be further illustrated in chapter 3.3). The initial workshop, set up to define the necessary information-focus, was followed by subsequent sessions, which created space and opportunity for the shop stewards to comment on initial book-drafts written by the Ilrig-producers.

Important changes relating to style, language, lay-out and contents were made to the book-drafts due to these sessions (see chapter 3.3). In this way, the direct interaction with the MAWU-readership made a distinct shift from the traditional mould of knowledge-production possible. Although the expertise of the producers (both in terms of knowledge and research- and writing-skills) still centrally informed that production, the needs and interests of the readers/book-users were now directly and actively included in the production-process.

The role of the Ilrig-producers had thus changed from one of “expert-dominance” to a position where the skills and perceptions of the producers directly interacted with the experiential perspectives of the readers.

The role of the Ilrig-producers within this process can be closely related to that of the intellectuals within Touraine’s model of intervention sociology (illustrated in chapter 2.2), where the researcher engages with an already established social movement to explore avenues for a dynamic dialogue between the practical consciousness of the movement and the theoretical knowledge of the researcher.

It is questionable though, to what extent the expert-knowledge of the Ilrig-producers and the experiential perspectives of the readers carry equal weight and status within the production process. The direct readership-contact during the production of the Africa-books served to highlight the differences in reader and producer expectations within the production-process - differences, which are difficult, if not impossible, to reconcile.

It has been illustrated above, that the Ilrig-producers put strong emphasis on thorough, well-balanced information and high-quality productions. But the long-term educational focus, and the inevitable time-implications embedded within this emphasis, at times clearly clashed with the needs expressed by the MAWU-readers.

Some of the MAWU organisers and shop stewards (and other trade union members, gleaned from feedback subsequent to the MAWU-workshops) have criticised the Ilrig-materials for their “openness”, and have requested a more strongly defined “information-line” with more conclusive solutions. This would imply a far more closed focus for the books and consequently a far more defined (both in terms of audience and time) relevance-spectrum.

The terms and aims of the producers thus clearly exist on a different time-scale to those of the readership. The producers’ aim of including information of long-term educational relevance in the books, often goes beyond the expectations of the readers - expectations which are most often informed by the pressing, immediate needs of the everyday work- and organisation- environment.⁵

It is this time-scale which creates a different level of priorities for producers and readers/users. This aspect has already been illustrated in chapter 3.1. In response to Ilrig’s initial enquiry about the relevance of an “International Labour Information Group”, the trade unions clearly showed positive support for the idea. They stated categorically though, that both lack of time and human resources prevented them from direct, active involvement in the project.

The time needed for the production of well-researched and in-depth educational materials thus does not seem to exist within the structures of the labour organisations. The priorities and needs of these structures are largely determined by the dynamic, ever-changing and often threatening political and economic realities of the South African environment.

The time-resources and skills (i.e. research and writing-skills) necessary for the Ilrig book-production thus lie firmly in the hands of the Ilrig-producers. The example of direct producer-reader interaction, demonstrated by the “MAWU-case”, clearly shows that the producers remain the “skilled

experts” within the production process. It is thus their terms and expectations - to produce well-researched, educational materials with a long-term focus - which dominate the production-process.

But the role of the Ilrig-producers does undertake an important shift away from the traditional mould of the intellectuals/producers, which has been illustrated in chapter 2.2. The direct interaction with the MAWU-readers accentuates what is already contained within the initial definition of Ilrig-purpose. The Ilrig-producers strive to erode the isolation of academic production: they attempt to share their skills and resources with a hitherto marginalised readership, rather than “shroud” them for the sake of academic exclusivity.

Furthermore, the role of the Ilrig-producers within the “MAWU-case” has moved beyond the “handmaiden-model” (see chapter 2.2) of intellectual-reader interaction. The contact between the Ilrig-producers and the MAWU-readers is more complex than this model would allow - the mere provision of knowledge and information by the producer, for consumption by the reader.

Instead, the MAWU-readers make a direct contribution to the production-process, in that their needs, interests and particularly their experiential perspectives are actively included in that process, directly causing important changes in the book-drafts. This process will be more practically illustrated in chapter 3.3.

Ilrig-producers do not, therefore, provide an “expert-service”, made available to readers. A far more complex process has been initiated, where producer- and reader-perspectives interact actively, making the “union” of theoretical knowledge with practical consciousness possible.

But there are clear limitations to the extent to which the Ilrig production-process can shift away from the parameters of traditional knowledge-production.

It has been repeatedly emphasised that the information-focus of the Ilrig-books - international labour issues - requires expert-knowledge, which clearly lies outside the experiential perceptions of the worker-readership. Furthermore, the research- and writing-skills necessary to present that information adequately, are beyond the immediate "reach" of the worker-readership, large sections of which are functionally illiterate and reliant on "mediators" to understand and interact with the information presented in the books.

The Ilrig-producers therefore fulfill a significant "production-role", which cannot be shared with the readers. An initial but significant step towards the democratising of knowledge has been made in the "MAWU-case": the perceptions, needs and interests of the readers have become a direct and active part of the knowledge-production. It is questionable though, how many further steps can be taken. It would essentially be necessary to "democratise" research- and writing-skills, so that the traditional mould of producer- and reader-roles can be effectively exploded. It is not clear though, to what extent the limitations imposed by "practical life" (e.g. the previously mentioned lack of human- and time-resources within the labour organisations), and the significant need for effective, high-quality materials make these further "steps" possible and desirable.

These questions can only be further explored, once the actual nature and role of the Ilrig-readership has been analysed more closely. This analysis is important to gain a better understanding of the producer-reader relationship within the Ilrig production-process. An understanding of this relationship is vital for a clearer perspective about the tensions, problems and potential inherent in Ilrig's popular writing activity.

3.2.3 THE NATURE AND ROLE OF THE ILRIG-READERSHIP

It has been emphasised in chapter 2.3, that the definition of readership is of pivotal importance to any popular writing production. The previous analysis of Ilrig-production has demonstrated, that the aim, content and form of the Ilrig-materials are largely formulated according to the group's defined "readership-focus".

Inherent in Ilrig's definition of readership is, furthermore, the producers' understanding of economic and political structures and dynamics within South African society. The Ilrig-production aims at informing and conscientising the marginalised and oppressed to enable a critical understanding (and possibly the transformation) of their social and economic position. The exact definition of "the marginalised and oppressed" thus carries important implications.

It has been shown, that the group's most central readership focus is the South African working class, and particularly the members of the organised labour movement. It would be too simplistic though, to conclude from this, that Ilrig's concentration on worker education and conscientisation happens to the exclusion of any considerations of popular history and popular alliance dynamics (the tensions between a worker leadership- and popular alliance-focus have been elaborated upon in Chapter 2.3).

Instead, Ilrig's "worker-reader" focus illustrates the group's realisation, that the South African working class incorporates a significant power base which, in turn, has given rise to the most coherently and effectively organised opposition-movement in South African history: the independent, non-racial Trade Union movement.

where the mass of workers are deprived of political influence, their labour is almost their only power base, and even in times of recession their organisations are treated with caution and respect. Inevitably, this is a factor which must influence the writer of popular history and oblige even those particularly sensitive to "the national factor" to take the working class into account.⁶

The target of worker-readership in no sense implies, however, that the Ilrig books focus exclusively on specific labour and trade union issues. Throughout the first two phases of book-production it was clear to the group, that the education needs and interests expressed by workers within various trade unions, went far beyond specific labour issues, and incorporated needs and interests vital to general popular opposition,

for after all, workers have to deal with the struggles in the sphere of reproduction in the hostels and townships, as well as with production in the workplace.⁷

This was clearly formulated by a member of Ilrig:

What we had to learn over time, was the fact that the trade unions have remained the strongest and most enduring basis for working class organisation in this country. It was significant for us to realise though, that the trade union members had far broader interests and concerns than distinctly defined trade union issues. Direct contact, such as the MAWU-seminars, clearly demonstrated that we had been wearing restricting blinkers regarding the needs and concerns of trade union workers. Broader issues such as education, health, various political systems etc. were high on the list of priorities for the workers. (Ilrig-interview)

The broader relevance of the Ilrig books, i.e. their focus beyond specific labour issues, has become evident through the wide-ranging use that is made of Ilrig materials by a large variety of community and educational organisations.

But although the importance of that relevance is evident to the members of Ilrig, their specific readership focus is directed at the South African labour movement, as too vague a definition of "popular readership" would be counter-productive to Ilrig's popular writing activity. Too broad a definition...

...is of little help in deducing the most appropriate form of writing for such a readership. Ultimately, for popular writing materials to be successful in reaching their intended readership, a much narrower and more specific definition of such a readership is required.⁸

But, as emphasised in chapter 2.3, and in the analysis of Ilrig's evaluation survey, neither the focus on a "working class"-readership, nor the more closely defined focus on "the organised labour movement", is unproblematic.

The South African working class is in no way a monolithic group, but is characterised by deep divisions. Similarly, the needs of the various organisations within the labour movement are not homogenous, but cover a significant range of priorities. The results of the 1985 Ilrig evaluation survey clearly show that a specific "trade union" focus does not make for an unproblematic target-readership. Highly divergent opinions regarding contents-foci of books, language level, book-format, and the level of readership within the labour organisations, amongst others, were expressed by trade union members.

It has been emphasised repeatedly, that it was very important for the Ilrig-producers to establish direct contact to a particular readership, for their materials realistically to incorporate experiential reader-perspectives. Clearly, it is difficult, if not impossible to establish such contact with a heterogeneous and diversified "trade union" readership.

Thus the "MAWU-case" created the first opportunity of real, direct contact between the Ilrig-producers and the readers. This "case" has been explored primarily from the perspective of the producer-role. It is now necessary to analyse the role of the readership in the "MAWU-case", to gain a closer understanding of its significance to the Ilrig production-process. The "MAWU-case" (from the perspective of the readership-role) is documented and analysed here on the basis of material provided by interviews conducted

with Ilrig-members, comments within the project-reports and developments documented in the Africa book-drafts.

Unfortunately no direct contact could be established with the MAWU-shop stewards, to gain actual reader-feedback about the "MAWU-case". It has been emphasised before, that lack of concrete reader-contact has imposed serious limitations on this investigation. Reader-presence and contribution has primarily been assessed from the perspective of the producers. It is clear that this does not form an authentic basis for the investigation of the readership-role. The limitations imposed on the investigation by everyday pressures within the labour organisations, do not leave much room for an alternative.

The MAWU-participants in the previously described "production-workshops" were primarily union shop stewards. Their role lay initially in defining the information-input they required from Ilrig. During the contact-sessions, which happened subsequent to the first workshop, the shop stewards were given an opportunity to comment on initial book-drafts, provide criticism and complement the producer-input with their own experiential perspectives. These direct contributions ensured that the producers became aware of specific reader needs and interests and were able to include those actively in the writing-process.

The MAWU seminars clearly illustrated to us, that the MAWU-workers had a vital interest in many broad issues. Due to requests and suggestions voiced by the seminar participants the "Tanzania" book for example, shifted from a "worker council" focus to address issues such as neo-colonialism and socialism in Africa. (Ilrig-interview)

The effect of this on the Ilrig production-process has already been illustrated in the previous chapter. The realistic focus on reader-needs and -interests has made for productions which are more relevant to the actual readership (see chapter 3.3), as an active reader-element has been a central

focus-point of the production-process. The MAWU-participants thus contributed significantly to a change of production-focus and -output.

But at the same time the "MAWU-case" also serves to highlight problems which are central to this definition of readership and the inclusion thereof in the production-process. The "MAWU-case" can be seen as representative of the general "readership-problems" and dilemmas experienced within Ilrig-production.

It must be emphasised that the MAWU-participants were exclusively shop stewards i.e. workers with a specific "organisation-profile", rather than rank-and-file members. It is not clear to what extent the interests and needs expressed by the shop stewards can be seen as representative of the broad mass of union-members. This dilemma reflects the difficulty Ilrig experiences in defining the general level of readership for its books. Are the books to be produced with and for rank-and-file members, or should they rather focus on the shop stewards and organisers of the trade unions?

As already mentioned, the initial Ilrig books, particularly the "Botswana" publication, had largely incorporated a focus on rank-and-file members, both in terms of contents and language level. Trade union feedback and the shift of Ilrig's focus during the first two production phases (1983-85; 1985-87), had, however, brought about a gradual change in the definition of readership-level.

The results of the Ilrig evaluation survey had clearly shown that different trade unions held diverse opinions about the issue of target readership. The most prominent opinions were

- i) that the Ilrig books were largely read by shop stewards and union organisers and were therefore seen as useful educational material to build and strengthen leadership elements within the unions, and

- ii) that the Ilrig books should primarily aim at rank-and-file members in order to create awareness about broader labour-related issues amongst all trade union members.

Despite this varied feed-back Ilrig realised increasingly, particularly because of the close interaction with MAWU, that the rank-and-file focus of the early books was not necessarily the most appropriate one. A particular readership-focus had to be realistic about the actual organisational structures within the trade unions. Restricted resources often allow unions to focus educational and training workshops at leadership-levels only. Furthermore, it is mostly the more educated activists who display interest in materials such as Ilrig-books, as a large proportion of the worker-mass is functionally illiterate.

Although Ilrig, right from the outset, has attempted to make knowledge accessible through "simplification" of contents, issues and language, the very focus of the Ilrig books remains a complex and, at times, abstract one: international labour issues as a topic, even though related to concrete worker experience, is inevitably limited to a spectrum of complex concepts. Sufficient interest is required to motivate readers to inquire about and deal with the issues presented within this framework. It is most likely that this interest is to be found amongst trade union members who are more intensively involved and active within the organisation. As a member of Ilrig formulated it:

Increased workshop contact has confirmed the notion in me that often the broader and complex issues analysed in our books are most useful to those who are very active within the labour organisations. This intensive involvement inevitably creates the need to be better informed and hence the sufficient interest. For these reasons our books have increasingly incorporated a shop-steward focus as the target-readership. (Ilrig-interview)

Interestingly, a more prominent organisation profile does not correlate with an advanced level of education. Hence, a production focus which

primarily concentrates on shop stewards and union organisers as its target readership, cannot assume advanced language proficiency. The books thus have to cater for a wide spectrum of language ability as well as different levels of "information-depth".

One can have more than one score running through a book simultaneously. This means that different readers can regard the book on different levels. (Ilrig interview)

Despite varied levels of education and language proficiency, the shop stewards nonetheless form a more or less cohesive group, marked by greater organisational involvement than the far larger group of "ordinary" trade union members. The shift of target-readership definition to this group as well as trade union organisers, naturally carries many important implications with it.

Broadly stated, the aim of the Ilrig productions no longer lies in attempting to reach a vaguely conceived trade union readership. Instead, the focus has narrowed to incorporate the leadership and activists within the unions, i.e. that group of unionists who are responsible for the organisation and education of the rank-and-file members.

So, the information contained in the books, and generated through varied usage of the books, is intended initially to be absorbed by union and factory floor leadership, before it can potentially be further disseminated and "mediated" for the broader group of union members.

The target-readership is thus attributed with a dual role within the knowledge-production process. Firstly, the shop stewards and trade union leadership have become the readership-focus of the Ilrig producers. In the "MAWU-case" direct interaction is established between this readership and the producers: the readers have thus come to play a direct role in the book-production process. Secondly, the target-readership holds the potential of becoming "knowledge-mediators", in order to impart the knowledge and

information gained from the books to fellow workers, in workshops, meetings and discussions.

The perceived educational role of the shop stewards and union organisers can therefore be closely identified with that of organic intellectuals, as analysed in chapter 2.3. Due to their close interaction with rank-and-file members, they have an organic understanding of the needs and interests of those workers. This understanding can in turn significantly inform the interaction between the shop stewards and the producers, i.e. have a significant impact on book-production. The union activists can therefore potentially adopt a highly significant role as “mediators” between the actual producers of the Ilrig books, and the large mass of workers who ultimately form the most important focus of any popular writing production.

This “mediating-role” has become an integral part of the definition and transfer of knowledge within the process of producing and utilising popular educational materials. As has been emphasised in chapter 2.3, the dynamics of this role are vast and complex.

Potentially these “mediators” could be the vital catalyst needed to realise the process of popularising and democratising knowledge - a process which in effect lies dormant within the actual written materials, but cannot be brought to life through them alone.

To return to the “MAWU-case”, the shop stewards participating in the book-production workshops clearly hold the potential of becoming “knowledge-mediators”. It can be assumed, that their perspectives are informed by the needs of the broader mass of union members, as continual contact exists between them. The cultural and conceptual isolation of the Ilrig-producers from the large majority of workers is thus to some extent potentially broken.

The establishment of productive contact-structures between the Ilrig-producers and such groups as the MAWU shop stewards holds greater

potential for success. It is far more realistic than the vague notion of actively including a broadly conceived "worker-readership" into the process of knowledge- (i.e. book-) production.

Clearly, what needs to be asked is to what extent these contact-structures can succeed in bringing about a significant change of producer- and reader-roles. Once again, it is questionable whether the content-focus of the Ilrig-books (which requires expert knowledge and extensive research skills) allows for a major shift of producer and reader status.

Nonetheless, the "MAWU-case" illustrates an important initiative to include the readership actively within the production-process, an initiative which could potentially lead beyond the Touraine-model to the kind of engagement between producers and readers envisaged by Muller and Cloete (see chapter 2.2, footnote 35): a "new" form of knowledge is created due to the interaction of different perspectives, where the practical consciousness of the readers carries equal importance to the theoretical insight of the producers.

This potential clearly exists within the "MAWU-case". It is questionable though to what extent it can be realised in the face of serious stumbling blocks which exist in terms of continual "real-life" pressures which have to be faced by organisations such as trade unions, e.g. serious constraints on human- and time-resources, which severely limit the ability of union-members to commit sufficient time to the building-up of appropriate contact-structures between producers and readers/users.

A further difficulty which is highlighted by the "MAWU-case" is the danger of parochiality. To what extent are the needs and interests expressed by the MAWU-workers sufficiently universal to be meaningful to other groups within the working class? Is the concrete experience of MAWU-workers sufficiently representative for members of other trade unions? To what extent can the producers include general, more universal concepts, in order to make

the books also relevant to a broader audience, if these inclusions are no part of the terms defined by the readers?

This difficulty has already been explored in chapter 2.3. Popular materials which are produced for, and in conjunction with a very specific readership could potentially lose their ability to be relevant to a large section of the population, i.e. record collective experience and link into a collective consciousness. This could further be aggravated if the trade union-"users" demand a closer adherence to the organisation-"line" from the Ilrig-producers.

Such demands (and some trade unions have indeed criticised the Ilrig-materials for being "too open"!) would create a difficult dilemma for the Ilrig-producers: to what extent could the "open", "long-term" educational focus of the producers be successfully combined with immediate, potentially parochial reader-interests?

The "MAWU-case" highlights significant and central problems in Ilrig-production and in popular writing in general. It is impossible to find clear and coherent solutions to those problems. Their complexity is linked to the fact that the readership element is largely anonymous and elusive. The actual contact-structures which have been established between the Ilrig-producers and the readers serve as some illustration of "what is possible". Yet they cannot be seen as representative.

The Ilrig-producers are acutely aware of this problem:

Although the MAWU-workshops were a very important step in our book-production, they do not constitute a systematic structure for gaging reader-feedback and gaining reader-input. Such structures are very important for gaining some impression about how effective our materials are. Up till now we have not been able to set them up though. (Ilrig-interview)

It thus becomes clear once again that it is the lack of consistent readership contact which makes a systematic analysis of popular writing activity - both in the theoretical and the practical field - very difficult. The

terms and concepts of analysis remain vague and confused. No real, substantiated answer can be found to the question to what extent popular writing materials can successfully realise their intended purpose.

Despite this difficulty, the following chapter will set out to analyse two actual examples of Ilrig's book-production, in an attempt to portray Ilrig production-purpose within the parameters of their materials. The only concrete reader-feedback on Ilrig-materials, which was gained during this research, is included in this chapter. This is done in an attempt to provide some concrete (although not representative) evidence of the effectiveness of Ilrig's popular writing production.

3.3 ILRIG: THE PRACTICE - A BRIEF LOOK AT ILRIG'S BOOK-PRODUCTION

3.3.1 General observations

A few general points regarding Ilrig's book-production need to be made before specific examples of that production can be analysed.

As has been shown in the previous chapter, the Ilrig-producers have been particularly concerned with what can be termed "high-quality" book-production. This concern for quality does not only affect the research-aspect basic to the production process (research which needs to be thorough and rigorous), but also the presentation and quality (of paper, print, illustrations, etc.) of the actual books. Ilrig thus demonstrates a clear commitment to providing their perceived audience - mostly workers - with productions of a high standard and attractive appearance. This is an important commitment within the arena of popular writing and must not be underestimated.

Popularisers need to create meaningful cultural space for their wares; to be wary of the potential absurdity, for example, of attempting to counter the messages of a glossy "Shaka Zulu" with a moth-eaten xeroxed pamphlet; to be knowledgeable about the workings of ideological authority, and cautious about assuming too readily that the "alternative" audience of today, so eager and open, will not disappear into a new conformity tomorrow.⁹

Furthermore, this commitment to quality and thorough research inevitably puts the Ilrig-books into a particular category of popular writing: they attempt to fulfill an educational role (incorporating a long-term focus). The books thus aim to educate the readers through making various perspectives available to them, rather than aiming to fulfill the function of agit-prop material. This book-focus is complex and problematic, as the previous analysis of producer- and reader-roles has shown. It remains the centre of heated debate within Ilrig.

Some members of the group have questioned whether books are the best vehicle to fulfill the purpose of Ilrig's production. Was the format and nature of these elaborate publications not too static to be useful within the shifting parameters of Ilrig's educational activity? If the arena of popular education was regarded as a developmental agency, was it not more appropriate to produce more "flexible" materials such as posters and newsletters? Should the group's energy not rather be directed towards establishing a more elaborate seminar-structure within which such materials could be utilised?

It has been realised within Ilrig that despite these misgivings, and the obvious shortcomings of producing more lengthy books (such as time and resources needed for that production), they fulfill an important role which cannot be substituted by other materials. Books are particularly important for providing Ilrig's readership with well-researched, elaborate information. This is an important basis for the educative process, envisaged by the group, to take place: the development of an informed, critical reader-consciousness.

Materials such as posters and newsletters are useful vehicles for responding to more immediate strategic needs and demands arising from the changing socio-political and economic environment. However they cannot provide elaborate information-input, necessary for an informed, varied perspective and a long-term educational focus.

The books, instead, can fulfill multiple functions. As will be shown in the following section, with the assistance of particular lay-out techniques, various levels of analysis (appropriate for different levels of readership) can be included and emphasised within a particular book. One publication can thus aim at a multiple readership-level and can be used in a variety of ways: as a single resource or as part of a teaching pack, for individual reading; as a basic resource for group readings and discussions, or as seminar material (the short-comings of this have been criticised by some Ilrig members, though,

emphasising that a more specifically targetted readership would be more effective). Furthermore, the books are a portable vehicle, which can easily be transported to a large number of users.

The production of books thus remains an important part of Ilrig's educational activity. Vital questions (already raised in the previous chapter relating to the nature of that production need to be posed again. To what extent can and must the Ilrig production-process move away from traditional structures for the production to be "democratised", or opened to innovative reader/user contribution and participation?

These questions can only be productively investigated through an analysis of practical examples of that process. Furthermore, it is of paramount importance to analyse the concrete (though limited) reader-feedback gained about Ilrig-books before any answers to the above questions can be attempted.

Within the framework of production and publication Ilrig has indeed moved beyond traditional parameters. The group has chosen to maintain complete control over the process of publication and distribution rather than submitting its production to the authority of an external publishing firm. The interests and demands of an external publishing structure thus do not have to be considered, which makes for autonomous decision making in important areas of the production-process, such as lay-out emphasis and the nature of distribution channels.

The actual writing of Ilrig materials has in itself undertaken significant shifts from conventional procedures. The traditional model of isolated author-production has been partly discarded in favour of rigorous communal editing sessions, which provide avenues for group-critique and participation in the writing process. This approach is problematic in itself though, as it can undermine authorial autonomy negatively. Artistic innovation can be paralysed by too much varied group interference, the writing process thus

becoming too static, the end-product too contrived. Despite these problems, communal editing forms the basis of an important production approach in Ilrig: the varied perspectives of the different group members are actively included in the writing process, perspectives which in turn have been informed by the contact Ilrig-members have to readers/users within seminars and discussion groups.

A further important aspect of the Ilrig writing-process is the central role "lay-out"-considerations play within it. As the Ilrig lay-out artist, has pointed out:

The lay-out in a particular book goes beyond pure aesthetic purpose. It fulfills an important pedagogical role in that it can emphasise certain aspects within the text, clarify written information through the use of illustrations, etc. It is therefore very important for the author to consider the lay-out during the writing process rather than merely regarding it as a cosmetic feature to be added at a later stage.
(Ilrig interview)

Clearly, continual reader feed-back is needed to establish some concrete ideas about the usefulness of certain lay-out techniques.

It is vital that the feed-back from users should feed into the lay-out. The authors often assume clarity where it does not exist for the readers/users.
(Ilrig interview)

Some channels (as illustrated in Chapter 3.2.3) for that feed-back have been established by Ilrig. As has been emphasised before, those channels do not provide for sufficiently representative and wide reader-contact though. Concrete reader-contact is a problematic arena which inevitably affects the extent to which the Ilrig-production-process can be "opened" to reader-participation.

Some significant shifts from traditional production- and publication-processes in Ilrig have thus been illustrated in the initial section of this chapter. They have not indicated though to what extent these processes have

been or can be “democratised”. They have not dealt with the roles of the producers and readers within the production-process - the roles which essentially hold the “key” for the potential to “democratise”. The following analysis of the “Mozambique” and “Tanzania” books as well as some reader feed-back about them hopes to investigate these roles more closely within the practical production-process.

Once again, this analysis is primarily based on interviews conducted with Ilrig-members, an analysis of available book-drafts and participant observation of communal editing sessions attended during the production-process of the two books to be analysed.

3.3.2 Two examples of Ilrig’s book-production:

- a) “Mozambique - Aluta Continua!”
- b) “Tanzania - The Struggle for Ujamaa”

Both the “Mozambique” and the “Tanzania” books are part of the “Africa-book” series which had been requested by MAWU. The implications and problems arising out of the relationship between MAWU, as the “client” with a specific request and Ilrig, as the producers responding to that request have been investigated in Chapters 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 and will not be elaborated upon in this section.

Instead, both books need to be analysed as concrete examples of Ilrig’s book-production, i.e. two concrete examples of popular writing materials. The analysis hopes to investigate the extent to which these books have shifted away from the traditional format and especially the extent to which the readership-element has been actively included to initiate a “democratising” process. To achieve that, various stages of “draft-development” for each book as well as particular aspects of the final book version have to be illustrated and analysed.

The primary areas of investigation for both books were defined during seminars and workshops Ilrig held together with MAWU shop stewards. A central interest expressed was for the development of socialism in Africa. Rather than treating it as a central theme for one major book, Ilrig decided to focus on particular case-studies of African countries where the development of socialism could be portrayed and analysed. In this way the group hoped to move away from difficult and abstract theoretical elaborations about the theme "socialism in Africa" to rather make use of concrete vehicles such as the case studies of countries and their inhabitants - case studies which could more easily be related to the experiential knowledge of the readers.

a) **"Mozambique" - Aluta Continua!: portraying the production-process**

The "Mozambique" book went through three major developmental stages, each stage influenced by feed-back gained from MAWU-leadership and shop stewards about drafts presented to them by Ilrig. This feed-back was limited, as it firstly did not include the mass-membership of MAWU (who were potentially future readers of the Ilrig materials) and secondly could only be focussed on particular aspects of the drafts (as a lack of time due to the more pressing agenda of everyday union activity only allowed for a limited number of "contact-sessions"). In this sense active reader-participation in the draft-production only happened within a very defined parameter - nonetheless, it had an important effect on the final format of the book.

The major aims underlying the "Mozambique"-draft changes were summarised in an Ilrig-commentary on the draft-developments:

- (1) Trying to write in a popular way, that goes beyond merely writing "simply", and succeeds in really "connecting" with the experiences of our worker readership.
- (2) To produce a book that is directed at a readership with different levels of interest and comprehension, and which will allow the book either to be read simply as a book, or to be used in educational situations.

- (3) To find ways of raising sensitive questions in a politically charged environment, and of allowing the material to be both simple and digestible, as well as sufficiently “nuanced” as not to be simplistic and crude.¹⁰

These aims summarise important intentions underlying Ilrig’s book-production, namely the intention to relate factual and theoretical elaborations to the experiential knowledge of the worker readership (statement(1) above), to make the book appropriate for a multiple reader-level as well as for multiple use (statement(2)above), to present information simply, but not to oversimplify: i.e. not to “push” a simplistic, singular line but instead to include varied perspectives in order to present information more openly¹¹.

To achieve these aims, the first “Mozambique”-draft had to undergo some significant changes. The initial draft format was very similar to the earlier Ilrig-publications: written in simple English, utilising detailed case-studies to illustrate and emphasise, but remaining essentially academic and “text-bookish” in its approach. Each chapter closed with particular questions for discussion formulated by the authors. Information was provided through the authorial voice alone, only occasionally giving way to quotes of “ordinary people”¹².

It became clear that this format was inappropriate for relating the information provided to the experiential knowledge of the worker readership. The style and text remained too “dry” and academic to be readily accessible to a non-academic readership. Furthermore, the questions formulated at the end of each chapter attempted to channel possible discussion along avenues conceived by the authors, rather than encouraging more open, spontaneous and genuine reader-response. Feedback gained during a MAWU-workshop indicated that workers found it difficult to relate to the style and format of the book, found it too abstract.

Under the Portuguese, there were only a few trade unions, controlled by the government. Now FRELIMO wants all workers to belong to trade unions. FRELIMO aims to help the production councils develop into full trade unions.

In 1983, FRELIMO established the first trade union federation, the OTM, for workers in Mozambique. In capitalist countries, workers use their trade unions to fight the bosses, and also the government of those bosses. But FRELIMO believes that trade unions have a different purpose in a socialist country like Mozambique.

It says that under socialism, trade unions should not challenge the managers, because these are appointed by the government, which is now a government of the workers. FRELIMO says that the job of the trade unions in Mozambique is to help workers to be more self-disciplined, to produce more, and to watch out for those who are lazy or corrupt.

(Ilrig-draft comment, p3)

The second "Mozambique"-draft thus attempted a significant shift from this format. The main questions dealt with in each chapter were posed through the queries of a fictional South African miner to a fictional Mozambican miner, who introduced the debates and gave the information in the first person. The impression was thus created, that each case study was told from the personal experience of either the miner or a member of his family or a friend.

I have told you about nationalisation and economic planning. These are both important building blocks of socialism. But our people in Mozambique have learnt that on their own, these two things are not enough to build socialism. Socialism is nothing without workers' power.

In the CIFEL factory, the workers were told: "Workers' control is the life and blood of socialism. Those of you who labour with your sweat to build the factories and farms must take part in running these factories and farms. If you don't build workers' control, then only a small group will control things. And the worker will again be exploited. This

(Ilrig-draft comment, p4)

The producers soon found the contrived nature of this approach problematic:

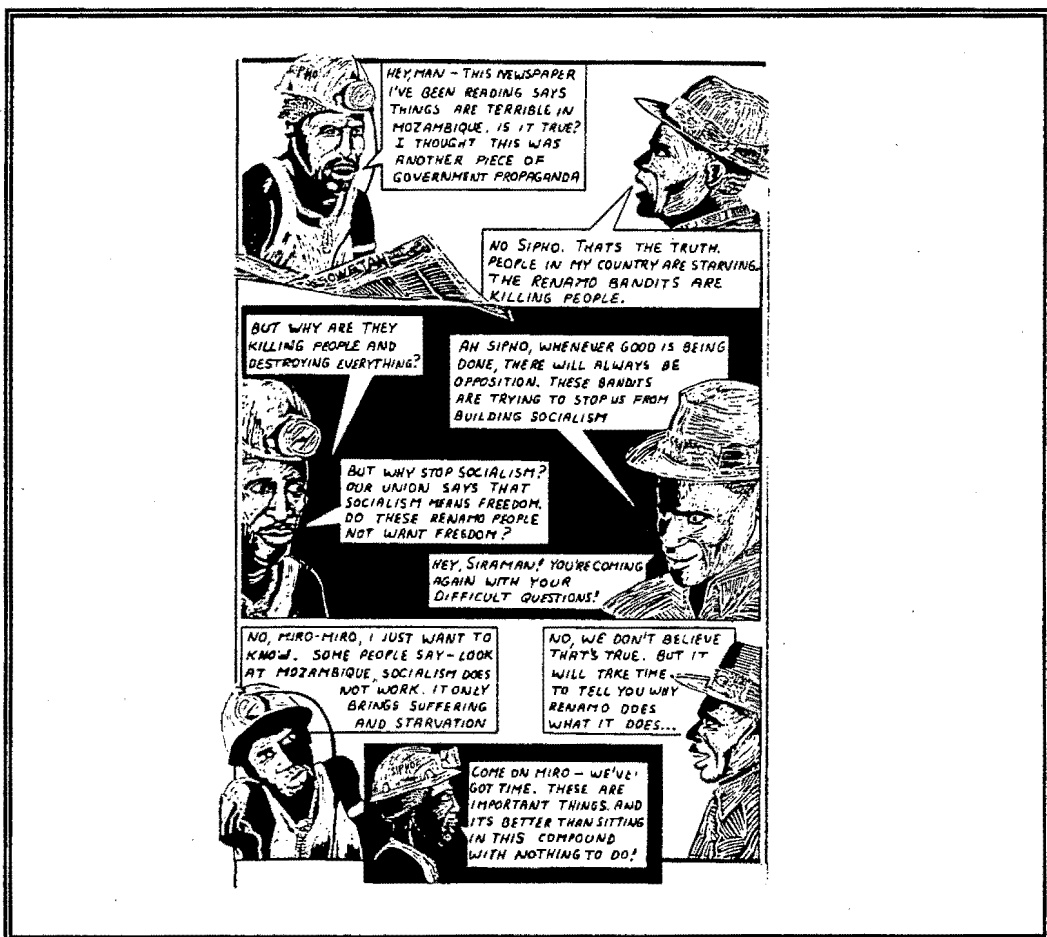
- * the use of the first person did not read authentically.
- * the Mozambican miner could not possibly have known everything he spoke about.
- * the use of the first person did not really add anything to the previous draft, the book still read quite formally and didn't capture the flavour of ordinary language.
- * the analysis either had to be left out, or if left in, read very didactically.
- * it became too advocatory/propagandistic, and began to read too romantically¹³.

This draft thus incorporates what has been termed “the experiential fallacy” by a member of Ilrig. Although the inclusion of genuine worker-experience in the book was very important, it could not be done at the expense of authenticity. As emphasised in Chapter 2.2, experiential knowledge must neither be neglected and underestimated in terms of knowledge-status, nor must it be projected beyond its realm. In the same sense as traditional academic production does not provide for the inclusion of important and illuminating experiential knowledge, “experiential fallacy” also does not allow for the productive and necessary union of theoretical and practical knowledge. The last two points in the Ilrig commentary clearly show the authors concern with indoctrinating oversimplification. A primary aim of the book thus is to present information critically in order to stimulate open debate amongst the readers/users:

Our written materials attempt to provide information from a varied perspective and critically, as only in that way the knowledge base of the readers can be broadened to empower through developing a critical consciousness. Our books thus attempt to move away from the banking concept [Freire's term] of education. That means, instead of presenting a narrow view to be “absorbed” and “regurgitated” by the readers, our materials attempt to stimulate discussion rather than “give a line”, to provide information to allow the readers to form their own conclusions.(Ilrig-interview)

The final draft of the “Mozambique”-book thus aims to incorporate experiential worker perspectives with an authentic researcher/authorial voice, so that the latter can substitute the former with broader information and a more objective, critical, theoretical perspective.

The central questions dealt with in each chapter are introduced by a dialogue (depicted in comic-strip form) between a South African and a Mozambican miner. The dialogue is followed by the authorial voice, which presents the researched information in a far more authentic way than had been done in the previous draft.



(“Mozambique” - p5)

More lengthy experiential information is provided in the form of case-studies, such as the "Cifel story". As in the above example, the case study is set apart from the remaining text through particular lay-out techniques. It has been consciously designed as a separate part, which can be utilised independently from the text (e.g. it occupies three double pages which makes for easy photocopying, thus enabling easy distribution). In this way just the case study could be used as reading and discussion material for a reading- or workshop-group, if time did not allow for comprehensive reading of the entire lengthy book-text.

This use of experiential case studies potentially increases the variety of ways in which the book can be utilised by the readers. Keeping the severe lack of time-resources of most workers' lives in mind (and available time is most often not spend on reading!), the Ilrig authors have ensured that the "Mozambique"-book can be used "in parts", thus not requiring a full read of the entire text. The back-cover of the book has been utilised to provide suggestions for use of the material contained in the publication (e.g suggestions for reading-groups, discussion-groups). The authors strongly encourage group interaction and discussion, thus attempting to move away from the concept of isolated, individual reading (an integral part of the traditional "banking format" of education).

Furthermore, the back-cover indicates that the "Mozambique"-book must be regarded as part of a "teaching-package" - i.e can be complemented by other materials (such as slide-shows) and is not necessarily a closed resource in itself.

Before the methods and technique applied in the "Mozambique"-book can be adequately critiqued in terms of their effectiveness, it is necessary to briefly illustrate the writing and lay-out processes in another example of Ilrig-production: "Tanzania - The Struggle for Ujamaa". Both

examples will form the basis of a critique of Ilrig's book-production, following in section c).

b) **“Tanzania - the Struggle for Ujamaa” - a brief look at methods and style**

The initial draft of the “Tanzania” book was conceived along similarly academic lines to the first “Mozambique”-draft. Feedback gained from one of the MAWU-workshops provided the basis for some significant shifts from the first draft: Firstly, the initial intention of the producers had been to concentrate specifically on trade union developments within post-independence Tanzania. The MAWU-workers instead showed greater interest in the broader issues of “Ujamaa” - thus significantly influencing the central focus of the book.

Secondly, the academic presentation of the first draft made it difficult for the workshop-participants to successfully relate to the text. The final “Tanzania” draft therefore contains many important changes in language, style and presentation, some of which need to be emphasised in particular.

The most important difference between the “Tanzania” and other Ilrig-books is the role the “Ilrig-voice” plays within it. The producers decided to “expose” the nature of the researcher within the book, so that the readers could become more aware of who the researchers are and how the research process functions. This was seen as an attempt to demystify the process, to undermine the assumption that a book *can* contain reified truth. The “Ilrig-voice” thus aims to emphasise the fact that the researcher is a person, portraying a particular set of views, which are indeed fallible and which can and must be complemented with other information. In this sense the “Ilrig-voice” directly counteracts an interventionist “line” approach. Instead it emphasises the ambivalence of the Tanzanian issues as well as the authors' inability to find easy, simplistic answers to that ambivalence.

The "Ilrig-voice" introduces each chapter, commenting on the process which was necessary to gain the appropriate information.

What has been happening in African countries since independence? Workers want to know what things are like in countries which are taking the capitalist road — like Botswana and Kenya. They also want to know about the progress and problems in countries like Mozambique and Tanzania, which have tried to take the socialist road. We in ILRIG began to write this book about Tanzania and President Nyerere's policy of Ujamaa— what he called "African Socialism". After independence in 1961, Nyerere encouraged Tanzanians to build Ujamaa — the kind of socialism which he felt could be built in an African country like Tanzania. But at first we were confused about Tanzania.

("Tanzania",p2)

The Ilrig-voice is then followed by either the authorial voice (providing theoretical input) or by case-studies, which reflect on direct experiences of social, political and economic developments of post-independence Tanzanian society.

The book is introduced with the Ilrig—voice emphasising the ambivalence of many issues and developments within Tanzanian socialism:

From the outset over-simplification of the issues is guarded against. To quote once again:

It is most important that our books contain a long-term educational focus, which cannot easily be linked to a propagandistic, agitational line. Instead it must be emphasised all the time that a great danger lies in over-simplifying history. Instead, a well-balanced, well-researched perspective must be established. The issues dealt with in the "Tanzania" book for example are genuinely ambivalent - an ambivalence which cannot be solved within the book, therefore the book cannot pretend to find a solution.

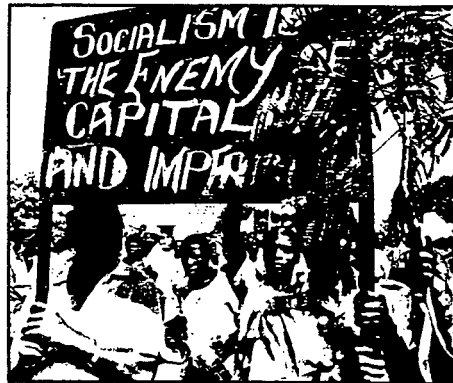
(Ilrig interview)

The lay-out techniques employed in the “Tanzania”-book are similar to those used in the “Mozambique”-book. Case studies and experiential accounts are set apart from the remaining text to emphasise their potential to be used as individual entities. Illustrations are employed to complement and clarify the text.

■
We found out that in 1967, Nyerere made the famous Arusha Declaration: “Forward with Socialism”. The banks, many factories, even the big shops, were nationalised (taken over) by the government.

BUT

By the 1970s it seemed that many managers and officials (**bureaucrats**) in these nationalised firms were not pushing forward with socialism.



■
The Arusha Declaration also called on people to build socialism in the villages. We heard about new farming co-operatives, where people shared the work and shared the crops.

BUT

By the 1970s many people had moved into new “Ujamaa villages” but inside these villages people farmed in the old ways. There seemed to be very few farming co-operatives.



(“Tanzania”, pp 2-3)

An important difference between the two books is the central conception of readership-level: although the “Tanzania” book can also be utilised by a multiple level of readership (lay-out methods have been employed to emphasise the more complex, detailed sections of the book), the detail and level of contents is directed primarily at educated, literate shop stewards, who are potentially active within the educational structures of the unions. The “Mozambique”-book instead incorporates a more diverse readership-level.

In this sense, the initial MAWU workshop-contact had provided input and feed-back about the first drafts from the actual target-readership of the "Tanzania"-book. The following section will briefly investigate to what extent the readership has been included in the production-process of the two books and to what extent this inclusion has led to the "disestablishment" of traditional production structures within Ilrig.

c) A brief critique of Ilrig's book production:

It is a difficult task to assess the extent to which the "Mozambique"- and "Tanzania"-books have managed to shift from the traditional mould of book-production. That is primarily the case, because so little concrete evidence has been gained about the use readers make of the books and their reaction to it. Many of the techniques and methods applied within both books are thus conceived by the authors, without any real feed-back from a substantial, representative number of readers about the effectiveness of these techniques.

The anonymity of the readership therefore remains a major hurdle to the attempts at "democratising" knowledge production. A significant shift towards this aim has been made by the Ilrig producers, in that the initial parameters of investigation for the books were laid down during the workshop sessions held with the MAWU shop stewards.

Although these shop stewards are only a small proportion of the readership, they potentially play a significant role as "mediators" between the mass readership (see Chapters 2.3 and 3.2.3) and the Ilrig-producers. In this sense the shop stewards are potentially representative of a larger readership-body existent beyond the workshop-structure.

These workshops essentially provided a space for the producers and the shop stewards to interact and consult about the major questions which needed to be investigated in both books. Although the entire production process remained in the hands of the producers, readership-contribution had

been gained in that the shop stewards could determine the kind of questions to be investigated.

In this sense the books incorporate direct reader needs and interests. This, in turn, surely increases the chances of the books actually proving useful to the target-readership. It remains questionable though to what extent the needs and interests of this defined MAWU-readership are relevant and appropriate to a broader reader/user body - a critical issue which links into the debate about the "universality" of popular writing (see Chapters 2.3 and 3.2.3).

It is clear that no fundamental change in the structures and procedures of book-production has taken place in Ilrig: the research, the actual writing process, decision making about lay-out techniques and control over the publication and distribution of the books remains firmly within the hands of the Ilrig—producers.

It is questionable though, to what extent these processes can be effectively opened to active reader participation. Collective writing, in the sense that producers and readers can actively share in the writing process, can surely only take place within a very limited sphere. In the case of the Ilrig-books, where the central subject matter is not part of the practical knowledge and experience of the worker readership, it is inevitable that the producers (ie the subject-experts) play a primary role in the research and presentation of the subject matter.

What is of significance though, is the Ilrig-producers' commitment to share their expertise and make it accessible and useful to the readers. The previous portrayal of both the "Mozambique" and the "Tanzania"-books has attempted to show to what extent continual awareness and consideration of reader-presence has influenced the nature, lay-out and format of the text.

The simplicity of the language, direct inclusion of questions raised by MAWU shop stewards (within the "Mozambique" dialogue), case studies

presenting worker experience and the use of lay-out techniques (such as illustrations) to complement those case studies, are but a few methods employed to make the knowledge provided accessible and useful to the readers. The use of the “Ilig-voice” in the “Tanzania” book aims to demystify research-procedures and knowledge definition, thus attempting to break down the reified notion of academic knowledge. In this sense both books are examples of producer-intention to demystify their own expertise and make it accessible to the readership.

A central aim of Ilig’s book-production is the provision of well-researched information to a readership which has hitherto been deprived of it. The producers thus attempt to broaden the knowledge-base of the readers, initiating the development of a critical consciousness within the readers - a critical consciousness which is “empowering” in that it provides “new” insight about the social and material conditions of worker-existence.

The two books under review have gone a long way towards achieving that aim - as far as it can be achieved within the confined parameters of written materials. It is these parameters which make it difficult for the Ilig-producers to dramatically move beyond the traditional structures of knowledge production. The “democratisation” of these structures can only take place once the role of the readership has significantly changed. The anonymity of the mass-readership body makes this change difficult, if not impossible. A mere attempt can be made to initiate a change in readership-role - an attempt which can be recognised in structures such as the MAWU-workshops.

The readership element thus remains a problematic entity within Ilig’s production process. The following section will analyse the limited concrete reader-feedback gained about the Ilig books, in the hope to throw some light on this largely unknown quantity and its perspective, understanding and use of the books.

3.3.3 Investigating concrete reader-feedback:

It has already been mentioned in Chapter 1, that a holistic investigation of popular writing is made very difficult due to the largely anonymous nature of the readership. The readers who are realistically "identifiable", i.e members of concrete target-groups such as community or labour organisations, are often impossible to contact for feed-back purposes, due to their more pressing everyday organisational agenda.

This indeed applied to the attempts made at establishing contact with the Ilrig-readership. Several concrete groups of readers/users (primarily trade union based) were contacted, but possible meetings were continually thwarted by the demands of the active world the workers are involved in. Finally, the only tangible feed-back was gained from an interview with a member of the Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union, who is an organiser for the Cosatu Regional Education Committee (Redcom) and had led a reading/discussion group, utilising the information and materials provided by the "Mozambique"-book.

The feed-back was thus provided by an educated union member with advanced literacy skills, who had acted as a "mediator" between the book and the group-members, some of whom were hampered by severe lack of literacy skills. This feedback has thus been gained from readers, who were merely the "users" of the Ilrig-books, rather than direct contributors to the production-process, as in the "MAWU-case".

It is clear that this feed-back is extremely limited and can therefore not be regarded as representative of a larger readership-body. It is nonetheless important to provide a brief synopsis and analysis of the interview, as it is the only tangible, concrete evidence of reader-opinion about Ilrig-books gained within the framework of this research, and it does provide some valuable

insight into the way the book has been utilised and received by a worker-readership.

Opinions expressed during the interview clearly indicate that the "Mozambique"-book had been positively received by the group, in that it had proven very useful in stimulating discussion amongst the group-members. Furthermore, the material provided in the book had served as a useful basis for exploring questions and interests central to the informal debates amongst the group-members:

The issue of Mozambique and the developments within that country after independence had been raised many times during discussions and debates prior to this particular workshop. The book proved to be a good, clear and accessible starting point for furthering that debate.
(reader-interview)

It is interesting to note that the questions and interests expressed by the MAWU-shop stewards and thus incorporated into the book, were of equal relevance to the Cosatu-workers participating in this particular reading group:

The comic strip is particularly useful: it highlights the important questions posed in this book and provides a clear guide through all the chapters. Particularly interesting was the fact that actual questions asked by the workers and issues raised in the debate before reading the book were reflected in the comic strip. It gave the group a real boost to see the actual questions they had asked, reflected in the book.
(reader-interview)

This has potentially interesting implications for the popular writing debate about the draw-backs of too specific and defined a readership-focus (see Chapters 2.3 and 3.2.3). It would be dangerous though to draw too many broad assumptions from such limited evidence.

The Ilrig-producers' attempt to make the material within the "Mozambique"-book accessible and useful to a multiple readership-level found a positive echo in the Redcom-discussion group:

The level of education of the group participants was very varied, although everybody had basic literacy skills. Interpreters had to be used to explain the more complex issues to some group members.

Everybody in the group was capable to do a "basic read" of the book, though.

Some of the group members were interested in discussing the more complex information provided in the "boxes" [lay-out technique], whereas others found that too confusing and preferred to concentrate on the comic-dialogue and the easier, more straight-forward explanations following that dialogue.(reader-interview)

The interviewee further emphasised that the group members found many parallels in the book which they could relate to their own experiences.

Participants continually drew examples from their own personal and work background to contrast or parallel what was illustrated in the book.
(reader-interview)

When asked about the usefulness and accessibility of the book-form rather than another medium of information, the interviewee replied, that books and libraries generally were a foreign world to most workers. He emphasised though, that this was due to their largely alienating, inaccessible nature. Books of a simpler and more accessible format often found a very positive reception amongst many workers. The interviewee further stressed, that a book was often the best vehicle to inform about certain issues, particularly because it could be easily circulated and shared as a resource.

A crucial problem for workers was the time-factor, as very few had sufficient spare time to read any literature, let alone literature dealing with complex, theoretical issues.

Reading workshops organised by the unions thus fulfilled an important function, as they both provided time and space to explore unknown materials as well as provide the resources (such as interpreters) for illiterate workers to gain and understand the information contained in an otherwise inaccessible format.

Books fulfill a very important role. The mass of people has largely been denied access to book-knowledge. It is therefore very important for books to be written in a way that is accessible. Books written in a complex academic style can be very paralysing because of the language used and the length. The majority of workers do not have a sufficient educational background to work their way through a lengthy academic

book on complex theoretical issues. Yet it is very important for them to be informed about those issues. Therefore a different kind of theoretical writing is desperately needed.

The other kind of popular writing that is very important is the one we spoke about before. It is those books that tell about the life and history of the majority of people in this country to make it as important as the history of the privileged class, which is the one that has been predominantly told.
(reader-interview)

When asked whether the "Mozambique"-book differed substantially from his description of "academic books" and fitted into his conception of "popular writing", the interviewee replied:

Yes, it is simple, clear, does not confuse with unnecessary detail, it concentrates on central information, but it does not take any misleading short-cuts. The participants clearly found it easier to use than other books. What is particularly important is the fact that the book related so effectively to their own experiences and working knowledge.
(reader-interview)

It must be emphasised once again that this interview cannot be seen as a representative reader-response. Firstly, it only feeds into a very defined reader-parameter (one Redcom workshop-group) and secondly, the educational and organisational background of the interviewee is not representative of the majority of workers. Nonetheless, as a workshop facilitator and "mediator", the interviewee's opinion is informed by more representative worker-opinion. His views and perspectives can thus not be seen as totally isolated from that opinion.

The "Mozambique"-book was clearly a successful resource within the framework of the Redcom-workshop. It was perceived as an easily accessible book, providing information which could be readily utilised and was useful for stimulating debate and discussion.

Most importantly, the experiential accounts in the book related effectively to the experiences and practical knowledge of the workshop participants, allowing them to draw interesting parallels. The questions formulated in the comic-strip dialogue echoed many queries and problems

expressed during workshop debates prior to the reading of the book. This clearly demonstrates that the authors were successful in focussing on appropriate reader needs.

Many interesting conclusions could be drawn regarding the extent to which a long-term educational focus *can* be combined with more immediate needs. Furthermore, it is interesting to note once again, that the specific readership-focus during the production of the book created questions and perspectives which are clearly relevant to a broader audience. This gives some indication about the “universal” potential inherent in a specific readership.

Clearly, the evidence provided in this section does not make it possible to assess the potential effectiveness of the “Mozambique”-books for a broader environment. It is important to note though, that within the “arena” of the Redcom-workshop the Ilrig-authors have been successful in producing a resource, which is more accessible and of greater experiential relevance to a worker-readership than, in the interviewee’s words, “lengthy academic books”.

This relevance has largely come about due to the participation of the MAWU-shop stewards in the production-process. Although this participation only signifies an initial step towards possible greater “democratisation” of knowledge-production, it did succeed in successfully realising a central element of popular writing-purpose: the “Mozambique”- book was an effective and relevant resource, significantly informing the perspectives of the Redcom-workshop participants.

A further comment on the effectiveness of the “Mozambique”-book comes from a rather different quarter: the bureaucratic state-machine. In concluding the critique of Ilrig-practice, the following section will take a very brief look at “the state’s” perception of Ilrig-production.

3.3.4 Investigating the state's reaction: the Publications Control Board

Shortly after its publication the "Mozambique"-book was declared undesirable by the Publications Control Board. A brief look at the reasons provided for this decision is important, as they signify interesting aspects of state-perception of the Ilrig-production.

The board's decision is clearly based on the assumption, that the book will successfully reach and have a significant impact on its target-readership:

The booklet is presented in an attractive format, has an eye-catching cover likely to attract attention and is written in easily readable and understandable English. Its appeal and comprehensibility to less educated readers will moreover be enhanced by the clever series of cartoons... If the publication is also utilised by groups, as suggested on the inner back-cover, the probable readership is likely to be substantial amongst both educated and less sophisticated persons, particularly amongst non-whites.¹⁵

The concern of the Board focusses on the nature of the readership. Particular emphasis is placed on the fact that the largest proportion of the readers is likely to be "non-white" and "less sophisticated". These rather problematic terms presumably attempt to describe a readership which is largely constituted of less educated members of the black working class. The effect of the book on this particular readership is seen as substantial:

All of this will in fact probably tend to make many readers in the explosively volatile South Africa of today more disposed to emulate the revolutionary armed course pursued in Mozambique to overthrow alleged oppression and secure the hoped for solution in the form of a truly free socialist state.¹⁶

The board clearly does not doubt, that written materials can in fact lead to transforming action. State-interest and control are seen to be undermined by a book such as the "Mozambique"-publication:

Bearing in mind also that the books probable readership is likely to be very substantial and that its impact will moreover be heightened if it is put to group discussion and use...,it felt that section 47 (2) (e) interests could well be radically prejudiced if the publication is allowed to circulate freely...a section 9 (3) ban is also recommended

particularly because of the almost inevitable misuse of the publication by groups.¹⁷

The Board thus sees the “Mozambique”-publication as a threat to hegemonic knowledge-control. Ironically, the Board’s perception legitimates the effect of the book beyond any proven evidence. The Board clearly does not regard the readership as an anonymous term, which can only be defined with difficulty. Instead it is assumed, that the book will reach a very definite, concrete target-readership: the “non-white”, “less educated” working class. Furthermore, the effect of the book on that readership is seen as significant: a raising of consciousness which will lead to transforming action.

The reasons given for the ban define the “Mozambique”-book as a successful example of popular writing: the level of language, the format and lay-out are seen to have been appropriately conceived to reach the target-readership effectively.

The Board’s reaction is significant: the perceived threat to hegemonic structures in itself puts (albeit unintentionally and indirect!) a “stamp” of effectiveness onto the “Mozambique”-publication. It is ironical that this reaction should be gained from a state-organ rather than from the readership itself.

3.4 CONCLUDING THE CASE STUDY: ILRIG PRACTICE AS PROCESS

The static framework of academic research is not the most appropriate method of analysing Ilrig’s “work-in-progress”. The parameters of Ilrig-production are dynamic and ever-changing. They are subject to the pressing demands of everyday organisational reality; they have to be sufficiently flexible to remain relevant within an environment of dynamic political and social change.

Whatever the methodological shortcomings, this research has attempted to analyse Ilrig as an illuminative case study of popular writing practice in South Africa. This apparent dogmatism (some may see it as “traditional academic production”!), can, however, be persuasively ironed out. The problems that have been highlighted will remain areas of difficulty and hazard, irrespective of Ilrig’s future progress.

The Ilrig case study has attempted to highlight the problems and tensions inherent within Ilrig’s production-process. This attempt was undertaken to establish the realisable potential of Ilrig production-purpose. It would be artificial to claim, that clear and coherent answers can be found to the problems analysed. The issues involved are too complex to be oversimplified in an attempt to formulate naive, unrealistic “solutions”.

The purpose of Ilrig-production can be closely identified with that of popular writing in general: the aim to make relevant research and information available to an audience/a readership which has hitherto been denied access to such knowledge. Inherent in that aim lies the purpose to “popularise” and “democratise” knowledge and cultural production, i.e. make that audience/readership an active and central part of that production. In Ilrig’s case the target-readership can be defined as the organised labour movement.

The Ilrig-producers perceive the process of “democratising” knowledge in terms of greater reader-participation in the definition and production of the Ilrig-books. Chapters 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 attempted to analyse the role of the Ilrig-producers and -readers within the production-process in order to establish the extent to which that process had been (and could be) opened to greater reader-participation.

The “MAWU-case” was illustrated as an initial step towards the active, concrete participation of readership. The interaction created between the readers and the producers ensured, that reader-interests and -needs became a central focus-point of the book-production.

Furthermore, the role of the MAWU-participants was particularly significant, as they hold the potential of “knowledge-mediators” between the producers on the one hand and the mass-readership on the other. If this potential could be realised, it would constitute a creative “channel” for the democratising of knowledge-production: the vast gap between the producers and the mass-readership, created by social, cultural and educational isolation could be realistically “bridged” by the “mediators”.

Productive contact between the “mediators” (as opposed to the mass-readership) and the producers is a more realistic concept - a concept which could ultimately bring about the mutual enrichment of practical consciousness and erudite knowledge, as perceived by Muller and Cloete (see footnote 35).

The “MAWU-case” served as a useful example of “what is possible”. But it is too specific to be seen as representative for a general Ilrig-readership. The lack of concrete, systematic contact-structures between the Ilrig-producers and the -readers/users makes a realistic investigation of innovative possibilities very difficult. It is impossible to establish the concrete needs of readers as well as the actual effect and usefulness of the Ilrig-materials if no systematic feedback can be gained from the readers/users.

Ilrig is acutely aware of this problem. The group’s increased contact within the last year to organisations such as Cosatu (within the framework of seminars and workshops) has insured a more coherent producer-perception of reader- or user-needs:

Our increasing participation in the shop steward- seminars have given us a far more immediate sense of the questions that are asked, where they come from, the needs and interests that need to be addressed. We have become far more aware of the background most of the seminar-participants come from and have begun to feel a far more integral part of the debates and issues relevant within this environment. This awareness will inevitably feed directly back into the book-production. (Ilrig-interview)

But this increased contact does not substitute for contact-channels which must reach beyond the seminars. Lack of time and resources make it very difficult for the group to establish and maintain such channels.

The analysis of the two Ilrig-books "Mozambique" and "Tanzania" aimed to highlight examples of Ilrig-purpose within practical examples of Ilrig-production. In this sense an attempt was made to illustrate the extent to which perceived reader-needs (based on feedback gained during the MAWU-seminars) had been included within the books, had in fact brought about major changes in book-focus and -format.

The sadly insufficient reader-feedback gained during this research was included in the case study to provide some concrete (albeit not representative) evidence of reader/user-perceptions about Ilrig-books.

Ironically, the most clearly defined perception about the effectiveness of the Ilrig-books was gained from an unexpected source: the "voice" of the state in the form of a ban formulated by the Publications Control Board. The authoritarian reaction of the Board to the "Mozambique"-book clearly signifies, that it perceives the book as a threat to hegemonic interests and structures. The threat is seen in terms of the assumed effect the book will have on its readers. Ilrig can derive a sense of satisfaction from this irony: the ban on this publication legitimises Ilrig's endeavours, as they are perceived by the state to constitute a "real threat" or "challenge" to its authority, and therefore to be highly successful!

The actual *evaluation* of Ilrig-production is made very difficult due to the lack of concrete knowledge about reader-perceptions of Ilrig's materials. The primary aim of the case study was thus not evaluation, but rather the illumination and explanation of the practical process of popular writing.

...[J]ust as the production and distribution of popular writing requires a thoroughgoing transformation of more conventional and conservative methods, so does the evaluation of such writing. It is...not sufficient ...to review popular writing in the way that literature is conventionally reviewed: as a piece of writing in isolation from the process whereby it is

produced or consumed. A proper critique of popular writing materials would have to go beyond this, and assess the political relationships within which such writing is produced, and follow its path after production, evaluating the ways in which it is used, and the political effects which it generates.¹⁸

The Ilrig case study incorporates an attempt to illuminate popular writing within the parameters of practical process. The demands of the above quote, to "follow the path of such materials after their production", could only be done superficially though: the attempt at analysing popular writing practice in its entirety failed in the face of insufficient reader-feedback and -contact.

CHAPTER FOUR:
THEORY AND PRACTICE - THE POSSIBILITIES

An attempt to fuse theory with practice was made within the case study. The theoretical debate arising from popular writing in South Africa has significant relevance for Ilrig's production-process. It would be unnecessarily repetitive to summarise the conclusions reached within chapter 3.4. This chapter, while based on those conclusions, aims beyond them.

This research set out to investigate the tensions of popular writing purpose and its realisable potential. Popular writing was seen as an important element within innovative educational practice in South Africa, which has developed largely due to recent dynamic political and social changes.

A definition and analysis of popular writing has to battle with slippery and complex terms. This research does not pretend to have found a clearer and more useful definition of those terms. It is hoped though, that the analysis of theory and practice has to some extent contributed to the popular writing debate, in that central dynamics have been investigated.

Chapter 2 served as a framework for the theoretical analysis. The purpose of popular writing, which was (to put it briefly) defined as the attempt to "popularise" and "democratise" knowledge and cultural production, was investigated in terms of the producer- and reader-roles within the production-process of written materials.

Various models of sociological intervention were illustrated, to discover avenues for the more "democratic" interaction of intellectuals with the practical consciousness of the target-readership. It has already been emphasised in Chapter 3.4, that both within the analysis of theory and the illuminative case study it was realised, that the roles of the producers and the readers essentially hold the key to achieving a shift away from traditional knowledge-production.

A significant shift from the hierarchical channels of traditional, academic knowledge-production has been described within the model of sociological intervention perceived by Muller and Cloete (see chapter 2.2). This model moves beyond the roles set within the PR- and Touraine-models: the role of the intellectual is further “disestablished”, as control over the interaction between the intellectual and the “local knowledge of the community” does not rest within the hands of the intellectual/producer. Instead, the theoretical knowledge of the intellectual and the practical consciousness of the “community” (or the readers) carry equal status within a productive interaction which aims to bring about the release of “the positive unconscious of knowledge”:

...[T]he articulation of the academic’s erudite knowledge with the local knowledge of the community provides a forum for the release of the subjugated memories of what Foucault calls “the positive unconscious of knowledge”. It is not simply conditional upon the knowledge of the academic or upon his or her initiative...It is rather the act of engagement which brings the counter-memories “into play”.(see footnote.(35)

A theoretical model is thus described, which aims at establishing anti-hierarchical channels of knowledge-production.

The case study illustrated, that the realisation of theory is difficult and complex within the practice of popular writing. The “MAWU-case” holds the potential for a significant shift away from traditional knowledge-production, if the role of the “mediators” can be realised effectively. An analysis of Ilrig-work clearly showed though, that the reality of written production makes such a shift difficult: the focus of the Ilrig-books requires expert-knowledge. Ultimate control over the book-production thus remains firmly in the hands of those experts, i.e the Ilrig-producers.

The commitment of those producers to share their expertise with the readership rather than “shroud“ it for the sake of academic exclusivity is an important step away from traditional academia. But it is questionable to what extent Ilrig-production can move further beyond the structures of traditional, hierarchical production. A democratising of writing skills would be necessary for this further step, so that the target-readership could be more actively included in the production-process. It is questionable to what extent this is possible and desirable (!) in the interest of well-researched, good-quality, effective written materials.

Hanlie Griessel, in her comments about the production of the “Sibambene”-book, highlights the difficulties of an attempt to significantly erode the control of intellectual expertise:

Perhaps the most important criticism I have is that I was so blinded by attempting to see the world through the eyes of the women literacy-learners at Mboza, and not to impose my views and knowledge on their own realities, that the end product - the book - may merely serve to give back these very realities...it may not allow them the material to transcend this reality...my views and knowledge remain opaque to them and were not used... In taking my commitment not to impose a removed and/or external perspective on them, I may have erred on another level - the level where my views and knowledge may have been of greater use to them than what they already know or their familiar reality.¹

The dominance of experiential perspectives over theoretical insight evidently does not hold the “solution” for the attempt to democratise knowledge. This clearly illustrates the advantage contained in a productive interaction between theoretical and practical consciousness - an interaction, which is the primary focus of popular writing purpose.

The theoretical model for democratising knowledge and cultural production is clearly conceived - but the path of practical realisation of the theory is complex, difficult and unclear. It struggles with a major hurdle: the definition of and systematic contact with the target-readership.

The case study has shown that lack of consistent contact-structures between the producers and the readers within popular writing makes a systematic evaluation of popular writing practice difficult, if not impossible.

Popular writing depends on the readership to a far greater degree than traditional knowledge-production. The perceived readership shapes the contents as well as the mode of production of popular materials. A successful shift away from tradition relies on the creative interaction between the producers and the readers:

Popular history makes special demands. More than in any other craft, it is the audience that shapes the content. At the same time there is the tension between the needs and expectations of the audiences (and there are several) and the ambiguous role of the writer/producer/intellectual (whether "organic" or relatively autonomous). What remains to be seen - and worked through - is whether this tension will continue to be a creative one.²

The anonymity of the readership-element within popular writing thus makes clear definitions of the practical possibilities difficult. Dire need for systematic research into areas such as concrete reader-perceptions about materials, the practical use made of written materials by the readers and the concrete needs and expectations of readers must be emphasised. Ilrig has realised this need for its own production but has not had the time and resources available to initiate such a process.

It is hoped, that this study will stimulate further initiative for research into this vital area - research, which will greatly benefit the development of popular writing practice.

Finally, it must be emphasised, that the theory and practice of popular writing are complementary elements within the ever-changing parameters of work-in-progress. The investigated difficulties and tensions within popular writing purpose are thus not seen as insurmountable hurdles. Instead, it is important to recognise the creative potential within them to successfully initiate and establish innovative alternatives to traditional, hierarchical educational practice. A potential, which can clearly be recognised within

popular materials such as the Ilrig-books and the examples of popular writing quoted in Chapter 1 - materials, which fulfill the important role of shifting marginalised perceptions and knowledge into the centre of innovative knowledge-production. In Domitilla's words:

Well, I want it to reach the poorest people, the people who don't have any money. It's for them that I agreed that what I am going to tell be written down...that it be useful for the working class and not only for the intellectual people or for people who only make a business of this kind of thing.³

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- 30) Cloete, N.; Muller, J., op cit, pp 13-14
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- 39) Ibid

- 40) "Agit Prop" or "Agitational Propaganda" - a form of literary and particular theatre (street-theatre) production, aiming to inform about immediate class-struggle issues, to awaken revolutionary consciousness, with the aim to lead to revolutionary action.
- 41) quoted from: Callinicos, Luli, op cit, p 24
- 42) see Steyn, A., op cit, p 21
- 43) Cloete, N.; Muller, J., op cit, p 3
- 44) Bernstein, R.J. (1976): *The Restructuring of Social and Political Theory* (Methuen&Co Ltd,London) p 217
- 45) Habermas, J. (1977): *Theory and Practice* (Heinemann, London)
- 46) Bernstein, R.J., op cit, p 216

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- 1) Ilrig Project Report (1985 - 1987), p 2
- 2) Ibid
- 3) see Ilrig Evaluation Survey (1985 - 1987)
- 4) Cooper, Linda, (1986), op cit, pp 77-78
- 5) Some of the Ilrig production has been geared towards writing pamphlets and short newsletters to respond to the more specific requests made by trade unions. An attempt therefore, to cope with situations, where the relevance of the response rests in its immediacy. the books cannot incorporate such a response - the time needed for thorough research does not allow for it.
- 6) Callinicos, Luli, (1986), op cit, p 26
- 7) Ibid
- 8) Cooper, Linda, op cit, pp 68 - 69
- 9) Bozzoli, Belinda, (1987), op cit, p xix
- 10) Ilrig comments on the three "Mozambique"-drafts, unpublished paper, p1
- 11) Ibid, p 2
- 12) Ibid, p 9
- 13) Ibid
- 14) Ibid
- 15) Report provided by the Publications Control Board, giving reasons for the banning of the "Mozambique"-book. pp1-2
- 16) Ibid, p7
- 17) Ibid,
- 18) Cooper, Linda, op cit, p79

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- 1) Griessel, Hanlie (1987): "Sibambene - the voices of women at Mboza" (unpublished paper presented to the ASSA-conference) pp8-9
- 2) Callinicos, Luli (1988): "The People's History Workshop", Wits, February 1987" in: *Perspectives in Education*, Vol. 10, No 1, p86
- 3) Cooper, Linda, op cit, p79

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