

"hisses and whistles"

A baseline study into arts
coverage in the South African
mass media

March 2006



DOROTHY

That's about it, I think. Bar the lead...
oh, one other thing, Andre Brink's new book: I promised a Q&A
weeks ago, but with all this...

She looks to Rocky [*a sports writer*].

ROCKY

What? Me?! Why? 'Cause I'm Afrikaans?! Joe, this is bordering on
racism, please! We talked about this, man, Dorothy!

JOE

He's right, Dorothy...

DOROTHY

Okay, okay! Calm down. No harm asking.

ROCKY

(cooling down)
Jeez. Get an arts editor, already.

Hard Copy, Episode 19

The Media Monitoring Project and Open Research are grateful for the time that the informants gave to the study, and would like to thank Business & Arts South Africa, whose generous sponsorship made this research possible.

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Summary of key findings

- Advertising and publicity play a considerable role in shaping how the arts are covered in South Africa.
- 40-60% of the space allocated for arts and entertainment content in newspaper supplements is taken up by advertising. In some instances, as little as 15% of the remaining space available will be dedicated to serious arts coverage.
- Publicity can account for as much as 60% of the editorial of arts and entertainment supplements.
- Of the six key arts genres, arts coverage is dominated by music (making up 33% of the editorial content items monitored) and film (23%). Literature accounted for 13% of coverage and theatre 12%. Together these four genres made up over 80% of the media's coverage of the key arts genres. Dance (3%) is the orphan of arts coverage.
- 31% of the advertisements for the arts monitored were for theatre productions, 29% for film and 20% for music.
- The majority of arts coverage in the media simply reflects what is going on in the arts rather than offering any kind of critical or analytical intervention. At the most, 25% of arts coverage can be said to be analytical or critical.
- Reviews are the most common type of arts editorial (making up 23% of the total content count), followed by listings (19%), features (15%), news stories (15%), and interviews (4%). Briefs represent 5% of the total editorial content count, and opinion pieces or commentaries on the arts only 2% of the total count.
- Formal distinctions between arts criticism, reporting and publicity are often not felt in the media. This is seen to have a negative impact on arts coverage generally.
- Race and culture impact on how the arts are communicated in the media. 62% of the artists covered during the monitored period were white, compared to 32% black, 3% Indian, 2% coloured, and 1% Asian.
- Female sources are accessed around 15% more frequently (or twice as often) in arts coverage compared to the average typically found in general news coverage of important public events. 68% of the artists covered were male, compared to 32% female.
- The extent of arts coverage in the news pages of the press is largely unpredictable, and depends on how media management sees the arts, rather

than on a programmatic approach to arts coverage. 19% of the arts content monitored in the press occurred outside of the arts and entertainment supplements or pages.

- The arts in South Africa made up 65% of the arts content monitored. While the arts from Europe and the United States account for around 32% of arts coverage, the arts from the rest of Africa made up only 2% of the arts content items. The arts from Asia account for a further 1% of coverage.
- International artists receive more attention than local artists. Tom Cruise, Michael Jackson, Bob Geldof, Christian Bale and Angelina Jolie were the most frequently represented artists. Kwaito star Zola and actress and director Janet Suzman were the most frequently represented South Africans.
- Practical newsroom constraints that impact on the quality of arts coverage in the media are strikingly similar to the constraints that affect the depth of coverage in other beats (e.g. HIV/AIDS). These include: staff shortages; limited budgets (which, amongst other things, impact on the ability to commission freelancers) and space constraints.
- A lack of young, skilled arts journalists coming up through the ranks is considered a crisis for the future of the profession and for the arts generally.
- The SABC lacks a programmatic approach to the arts. While the broadcaster is supportive of the arts and says it wants to do more, it does not have a clear policy strategy that spells out how it will achieve this.

1. Introduction

By most accounts South Africa is currently experiencing reinvigorated interest in the arts. Attendance at festivals and theatres is reported to be on the increase; films produced locally, with local actors, are receiving critical acclaim abroad; some publishers are taking fresh and perhaps unprecedented risks with new writers; previously 'elite' arts such as opera and classical music are receiving strong multi-racial audiences; new galleries are opening up and one gets the feeling that performance poetry is everywhere.

Yet many feel that the media are not giving serious attention to the arts. What passes for arts coverage, it is argued, shows a facile emphasis on the entertainment value of the arts, or a preference for cut-and-paste Hollywood gossip, rather than a proper engagement with what is being produced by South Africa's artists and with what art has to say about who we are. The media have "juniorised" arts coverage by relegating arts stories to inexperienced journalists, by reducing space available for coverage, and by relying too eagerly on publicists to keep them informed about what is going on. In this respect, many contend, the media are being 'lazy', and are failing to communicate the arts properly to the public, who want to know more, and who deserve better.

This kind of criticism of coverage is not confined to South Africa. Internationally arts coverage is said to be under siege. In the United States, in particular, shrinking media space for the arts has caused concern. As a 2002 symposium attended by arts journalists and newspaper executives from a host of prominent publications put it:¹

National Public Radio, the *New York Times* and other major media outlets have initiated structural changes in their cultural coverage, leading to shake-ups of mission and uncertainly among arts staffs. Experienced arts writers are encouraged to take euphemistically titled 'early retirement' packages. Newspaper chains are eliminating local staff critics to exploit 'economies of scale' by feeding a single writer's pieces to a network of affiliates. And the financial belt-tightening often leads to the slashing of coverage of books and classical music – subjects that draw limited advertising support. Arts writers and editors are struggling with the thankless task of making a quantitative, bottom-line-driven case for their beats. Alarm bells are ringing (NAJP, 2002).

The arts are a diverse and broad field. What we could call arts coverage occurs everywhere – it is not confined to any particular section or supplement in a newspaper, or programme broadcast on radio or TV. For instance, the arts are

¹ The symposium was organised by the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University. The programme's 1999 study, *Reporting the Arts*, was, in part, the inspiration for this study. Perhaps in a tellingly twist of irony, during the course of this study the programme was shut down after failing to raise funds. It was described as "America's sole academic center dedicated to the advancement of arts and cultural journalism" (www.najp.org).

sometimes reported as hard news; sometimes as an issue for the business or opinion pages; local artistic production can form the focus of a travel feature; it can be covered as a development issue; as a point of political interest (e.g. what the minister of arts and culture says and does); as an issue of technical interest (e.g. the use of technology to create art, or the story behind the latest animation or special effects); or even as a scientific curiosity, as in biogenetic art.

The ubiquity of arts coverage is particularly felt in broadcasting. While a number of radio stations have particular programmes set aside to cover arts genres, such as books or film, the arts are sometimes raised in a variety of programming time slots. These include current affairs debates, which have a broad programming agenda, or in personality-driven talk shows, where the day-to-day programming ranges from anything to do with the latest political scandal or crime story, to gardening, baking, fashion, history, religion or new age spirituality. For some radio stations, such as Kaya FM, cultural issues form part of their marketed identity and, in line with this, exposure for the arts occurs “across the board” (Pope, 2005. Int.):

Even on the breakfast show we will do interviews with up-and-coming actors. On a Friday we have a spot that totally focuses on local artists – artists and musicians. We have people playing live, like guitarists. On the Friday night we bring in people who have made a difference as a South African – and they play their kind of music (Ibid.)

While this posed methodological challenges for this study – what to monitor and how – it is also true to say that although arts coverage can occur almost anywhere, it doesn't mean that it often does. Nor does it suggest that the coverage attempts to seriously engage with the arts.

As this study suggests, while we talk practically of “the arts”, imbedded within this are often complex and competing notions of value and identity, ideological struggles for power, for recognition, to be heard, to preserve, to exist. The arts instinctively test and provoke these fault lines.

The arts are not neutral, and they mean something different to each person. For some they engage fundamental issues about ourselves; for others they're a pastime, a diversion, simply entertainment. Some people sell the arts: they're a product, like toothbrushes, or underarm deodorant. For others, they are a lifestyle choice.

How good or bad the media's coverage of the arts is seen to be, depends to a large extent on an individual's relation to the arts – what he or she needs from arts coverage. For a publicist it's one thing; for a musician, who has just recorded a groundbreaking CD, it may be another; for an administrator, a third; for a fan, something entirely different. What is called good or bad tends to reflect what is most important to each of us.

In these senses this study begins in a state of disagreement. The media are not immune to these issues – news is, after all, put together by people – and informants

suggested various interpretations of what good arts coverage entailed, and various justifications of how their particular publication or programme covers the arts. Much of this is said to hinge on audience or reader surveys – on what target markets want.

This makes research into arts coverage in the media different to research into other kinds of media coverage. For example, while research into HIV/AIDS coverage presents its own challenges (its own fault lines), there is an understanding of the importance of HIV/AIDS as an issue in South Africa, and – despite the denialists – general agreement on what it is we are talking about.

But when a newspaper or a broadcaster claims: 'We support the arts' – what exactly does it mean? When the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) says: 'We are aware that we need to do more for the arts' – as it does – what does it mean? When artists say: 'The media are not supporting the arts' – as many do – what do they mean by 'the arts'?

This study is the first baseline study into arts coverage in the mass media in South Africa. It aims to distil the key issues that impact on why and how the arts are reported in the South African media. A number of smaller studies and workshops have addressed how the media reports the arts. At universities the subject has formed the focus of several Masters theses. The issue of arts coverage has also been on the agenda of a number of arts activists, administrators and organizers for some time. The state of arts journalism in South Africa is clearly a bone of contention in the arts community and even amongst practicing arts journalists, many of whom note the sharp divide between arts reporting in the 1970s, 80s and early 90s and today.

The quantitative monitoring to this study provides baseline data against which future studies and shifts in media coverage of the arts can be mapped. The interviews were wide-ranging and sought to access as many different points in the media production line as possible. The two speak to each other, with the findings of the interviews offering possible causes for the symptoms.

Arts coverage is not the responsibility of any single newspaper or broadcaster. Nor is good arts coverage simply the responsibility of journalists (as the section on publicity illustrates). It is, in the end, a collective effort. As one informant put it: "There's a huge interest here, and it could be more. It's about working hard." (Sapieka, 2005. Int.).

2. Objectives of the study

This study aims to:

- Distil the key factors affecting how the media communicate the arts to the public;
- Provide a bedrock of quantitative and qualitative data against which future studies into arts coverage can be compared;
- Stimulate public debate, in the media and elsewhere, on arts coverage in South Africa.

3. Methodology

This study was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methodology.

3.1 Quantitative methodology

23 newspapers, 10 television programmes and six radio programmes were monitored over a period of one month, between June and July 2005.

The newspapers selected provided a strong regional, national and language mix, and included daily and weekly publications. To identify arts programming on radio and television, we asked select broadcasters to say what they considered their key arts programmes, or when they felt arts coverage typically occurred. For a list of the programmes and newspapers monitored, see Appendices 1 and 2.

All content items that were broadcast within the selected programme slots or published in supplements where arts coverage typically appears were monitored – including advertising and listings, and ‘not art’ content, such as miscellaneous crosswords, horoscopes and comics. Listings were treated collectively, in that each listing entry was not monitored as a separate item. For advertising, the type of product being advertised was captured.

The monitoring criteria for arts content was comprehensive, and included the following elements:

- The genre of art covered;
- The type of story (e.g. news story, brief or review);
- A brief summary of the story;
- Whether the art covered was local or international in origin;
- The race and gender of the artist represented in the story;
- Whether the content item could be considered publicity, or offered some form of critical intervention.

For the last, the monitoring methodology included a range of systematic questions, such as: “Does the item explicitly promote the artistic production being discussed?”; “Does the item provide a summary or outline of the artistic content?”; “Is the item

descriptive only?"; "Does the item provide a recommendation?"; "Is there clear evidence of the author's opinion?", and "Does the item provide any analysis?".

3.2 Qualitative methodology

29 interviews were conducted for the purposes of this study. These were conducted face-to-face, by e-mail and telephone, and included interviews with media managers, journalists, editors, publicists and presenters. In all instances, direct quotations from informants are referenced in the form (name, date, Int.). In instances where informants wished to remain anonymous, they are indicated by profession rather than name; for example: (Publicist, 2005. Int.).² For a complete list of informants, see Appendix 3.

3.3 Online survey

An online survey was conducted to gauge the impressions of arts coverage in the media within the arts community. This was circulated to some 23 000 subscribers on Artslink.co.za and the Centre for the Book's electronic mailing list. The results from this survey are tabulated in Appendices 5 and 6.

² In the case of media management, "MM" is used. "Journ." is used for journalist.

4. Definitions

The arts: This study defines the arts as comprising six key genres: dance, theatre, film, literature, visual arts and music. For practical purposes, questions such as ‘What is art?’ have been avoided, and an inclusive approach has been taken for each of these genres. For example, the study makes no immediate distinction between the latest Hollywood blockbuster and an art-house film, or between the latest single by Britney Spears, or a Shostakovich recital by the Johannesburg Philharmonic Orchestra. However, disciplines that could be counted as art, such as architecture or design are, for practical purposes, not included in the six key genres. Literature includes all fiction and poetry (including coverage of performance poetry or poems printed in the press). The term “visual arts” is widely accepted to include all forms of fine art or derivatives of fine art, as well as the applied arts.

Art: “Art” is used freely in this study to refer to any form of artistic production (in line with the arts) including “ritual-as-art” or any other sacred ceremony presented to an audience.

Arts coverage: This refers to any arts item, including publicity, but excluding advertising and listings. Music radio stations (such as Classic FM or Highveld Stereo) or TV programmes that simply play music videos are considered couriers of arts content, rather than providing arts coverage. However, if music is played or a music video broadcast during the programmes monitored, it is considered arts coverage. For the purposes of this study, television coverage is not considered arts coverage.

Arts pages versus entertainment or lifestyle supplements: In much of the print media, arts coverage occurs in entertainment or lifestyle supplements. However, some media dedicate certain pages to arts or books coverage outside of these supplements. These are referred to as arts pages.

Arts reporting: The use of the term ‘arts reporting’ is broad, and includes hard news reporting (including investigative journalism), feature writing and interviews. It is distinct from publicity in that it is not necessarily event based, it is proactive, and it requires the normal codes of objectivity that govern day-to-day journalism.

Audience: Refers both to listeners and viewers.

Content items: This refers to individual items monitored in the study, including arts coverage, ‘not arts’ coverage (such as travel features or recipes), advertisements, and miscellaneous content typically found in entertainment or lifestyle supplements such as crosswords, horoscopes and comics.

Criticism: Although a simple definition on what constitutes arts criticism is difficult to come by, our use of the term refers to the evaluation or analysis of a work of art. Typically this evaluation will have a number of attributes: it will be considered; it will engage fruitfully with the work of art; it will attempt to understand what the work of art is trying to do, where it succeeds and where it fails; and, while reflecting on the contemporary significance of the work of art, it may provide an historical context in

which it can be better understood. Arts criticism should ideally be independent of influences that may undermine its ability to be objective.

Editor: In all instances this refers to the editor of an entertainment or lifestyle supplement or of arts pages in the press. In broadcast this can be taken to be the person who has editorial control over content, be this a presenter or producer.

Editorial: Refers to arts coverage in both print and broadcast.

Journalist: Except when indicated otherwise, the term is used loosely to refer to anyone who prepares arts content for the media, including arts editors, presenters and producers.

Newsroom: Used to refer to any centralized media location where arts coverage is prepared for print or broadcast.

Media: In this study 'media' refers to the mass media (or media with a high circulation or audience) and includes newspapers, television and radio, but excludes magazines (except where they are supplements to a newspaper) and the Internet.

Media management: includes the managers of a media group, station or newspaper, as well as the chief editor/s of a newspaper and his or her equivalent in broadcast. It is used collectively to differentiate these from the arts editor. In some instances, 'media management' may describe the separation of authority between a presenter and a producer, or a presenter and producer and a channel director.

5. Limitations of the study

While the monitoring of the print media can be considered comprehensive, for practical purposes, the monitoring of broadcast media was selective. The findings for broadcast media are, therefore, suggestive, rather than statistical accounts of trends in arts coverage.

Although the interviews attempted to incorporate as many different perspectives as possible, practical limitations meant that these could not be comprehensive.

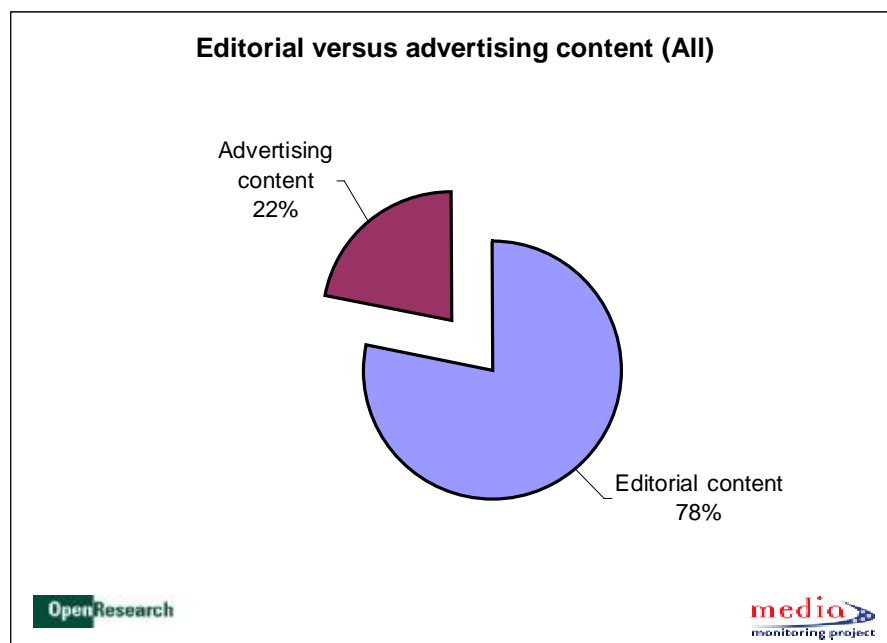
Changes may have taken place in some newsrooms in the time between the interview process and the publication of this report. Where these were evident, a footnote is provided by way of explanation.

6. Overview of quantitative findings

A total of 4499 content items were monitored during the research period. The range of content monitored was broad, and included coverage of all key arts genres as well as 'not arts' coverage, such as television, fashion, pop culture and lifestyle content.

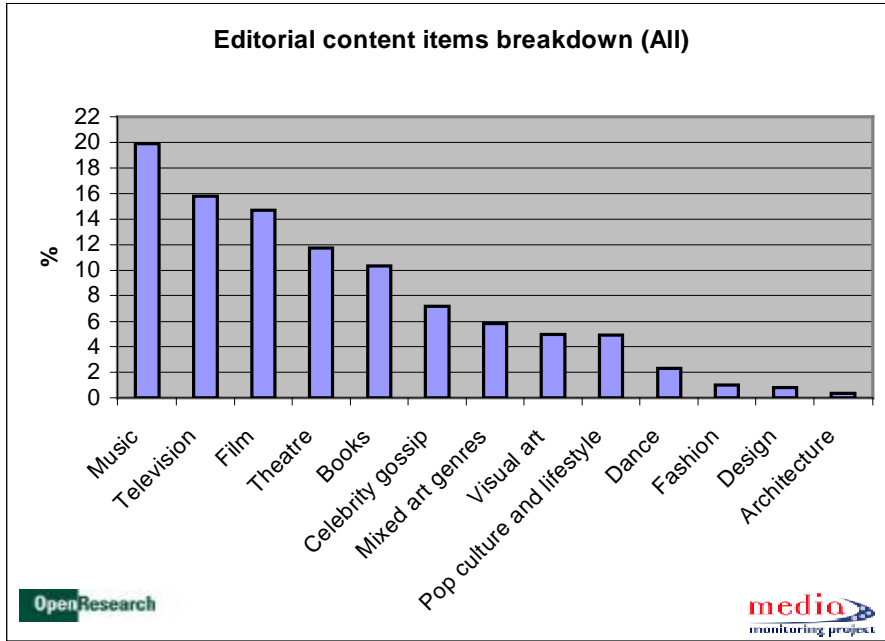
6.1 Editorial versus advertising content

Graph 1



Graph 1 shows that for all content items monitored (4499), advertising accounted for 22% (or 990) of the items. 78% (3509) of the content items were editorial content items.

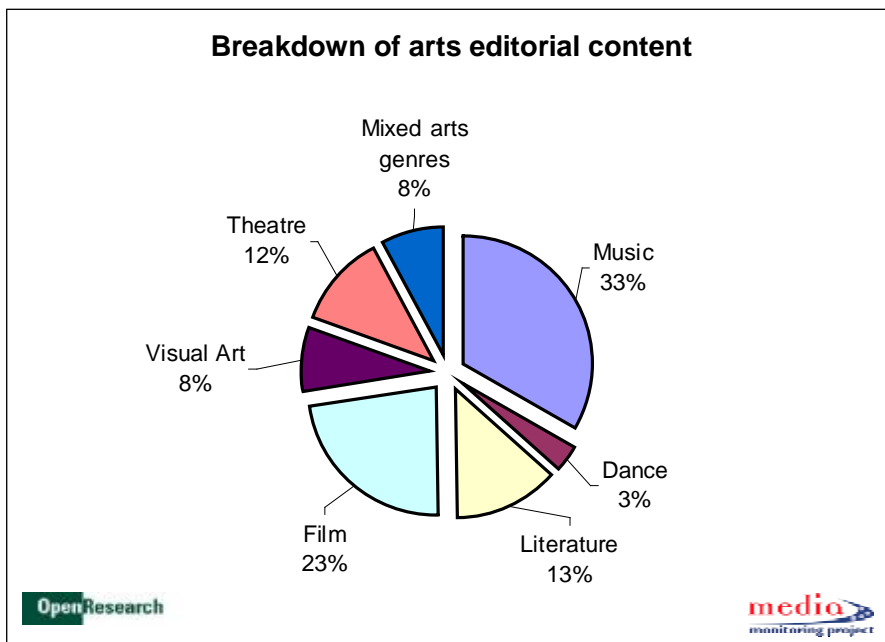
Graph 2



Graph 2 shows that for all the editorial content items monitored, music (20%), television (16%), film (15%), theatre (12%) and books³ (10%) were the most frequent content items found. Together these made up 73% of the total editorial content items monitored. Celebrity gossip accounted for 7% of the total content items monitored, and pop culture and lifestyle⁴ content 5%.

6.2 Key arts genres

Graph 3

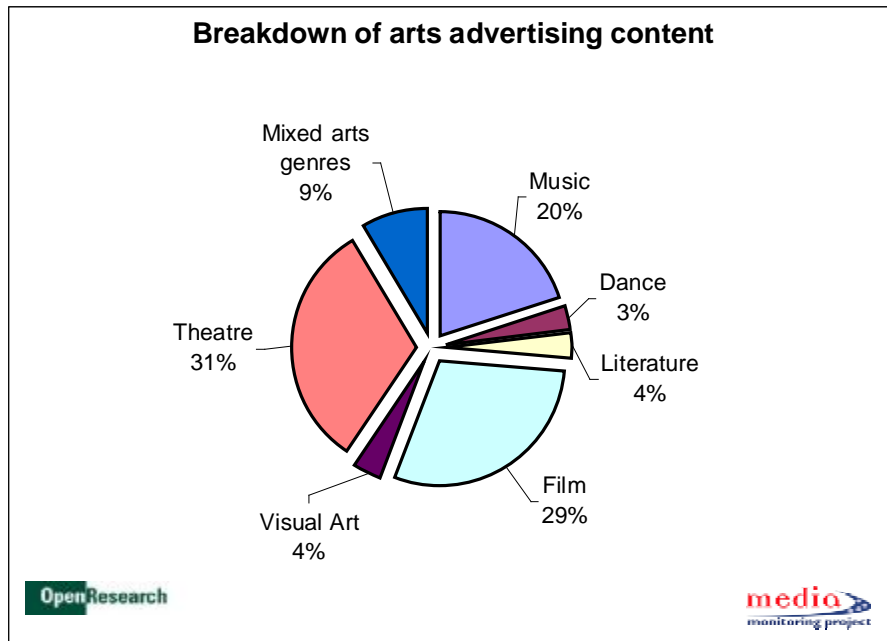


³ This includes coverage of non-fiction.

⁴ Such as travel and food content items.

Graph 3 shows the breakdown of editorial content dealing with the six key arts genres (2501 content items). As it suggests, arts coverage is dominated by music (33%) and film (23%). Literature accounts for 13% of coverage and theatre 12%. Together these four genres make up over 80% of the media's coverage of the key arts genres. Dance (3%) is the orphan of arts coverage.

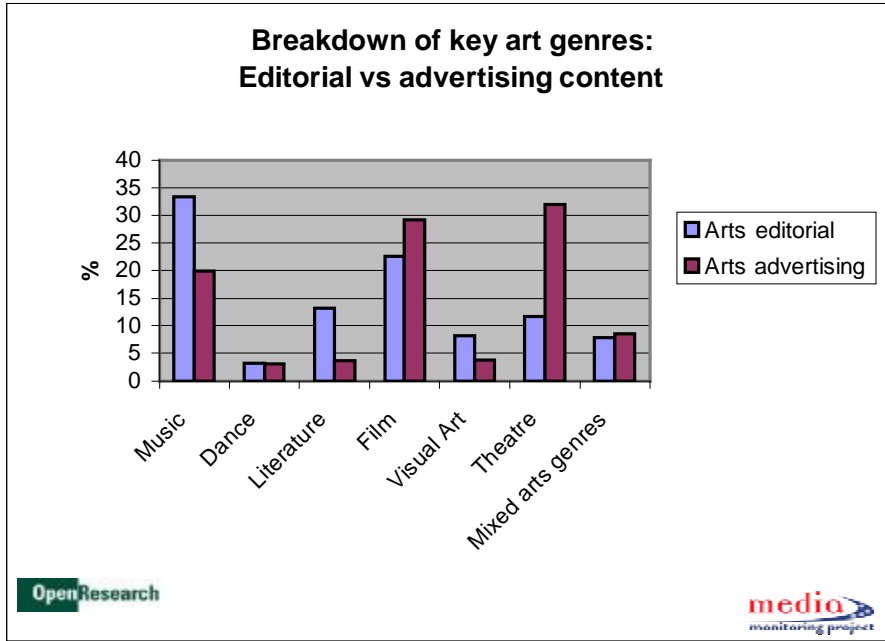
Graph 4



Graph 4 shows the breakdown of advertising for the arts, such as advertisements for films, shows or exhibitions (754 content items). As it suggests, theatre (31%), film (29%) and music (20%) are the most frequently advertised arts productions or products.⁵

⁵ These totals only indicate frequency of advertisements placed, and not the value of those advertisements to the media. For example, a single theatre advertisement typically takes up fewer column inches compared to a film advertisement.

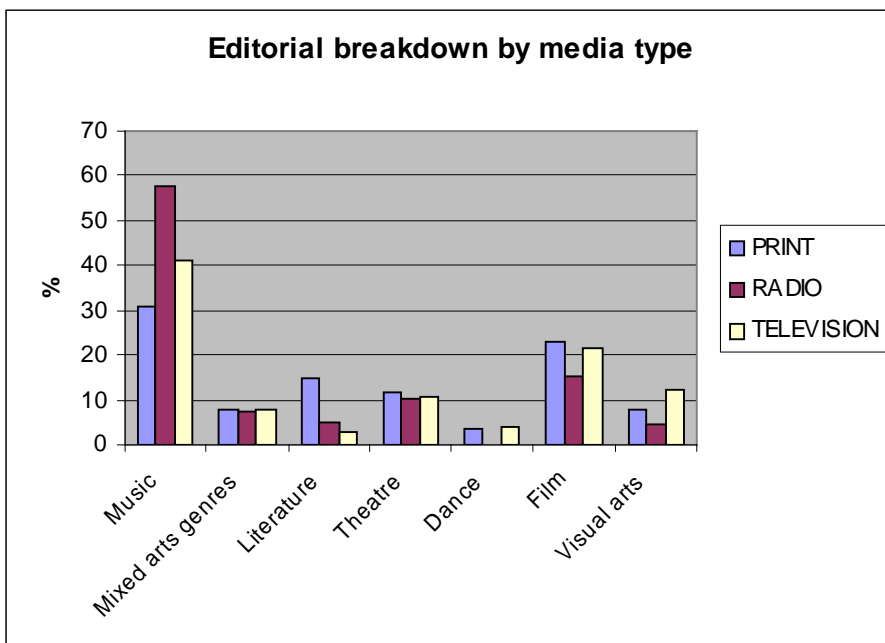
Graph 5



Graph 5 shows coverage for the key arts genres compared to advertising for the key arts genres. As the graph suggests, although theatre productions (32%) are advertised in the media more frequently than literature (4%), coverage of literature (13%) occurs as often as theatre coverage (12%). This suggests that in these instances coverage is not necessarily dependent on the value of advertising to the media for the genres.

However, coverage of some genres, such as film (23%), is potentially influenced by the amount of advertising received for the genres (29% of the arts advertisements monitored were for film).

Graph 6



Graph 6 shows the editorial breakdown by media: print, radio and television. Music accounts for 31% of arts coverage in print, followed by film (23%), literature (15%) and theatre (12%). Together these make up over 80% of print coverage. While the visual arts make up 8% of arts coverage in print, dance (3%) is infrequently reported.

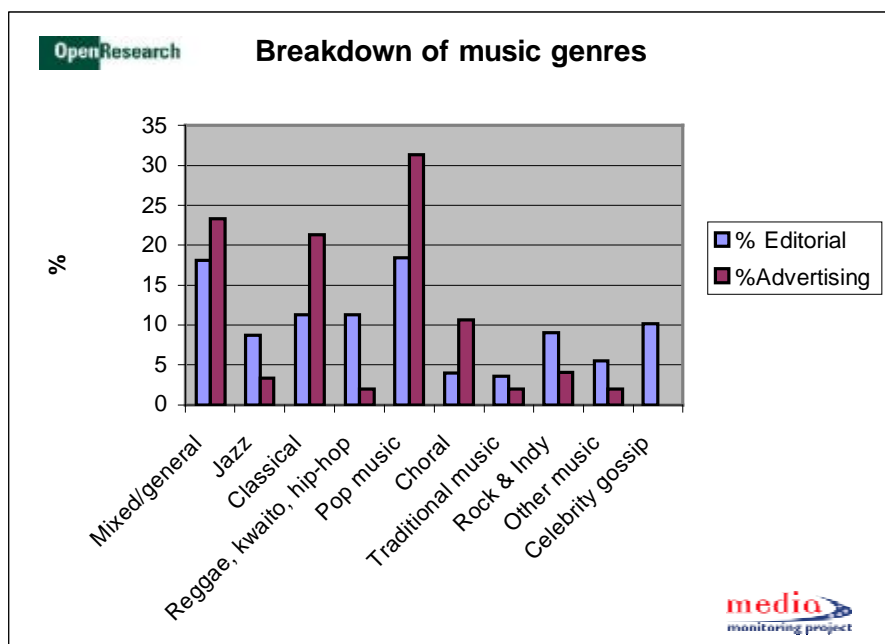
Radio shows a comparatively uneven spread of arts coverage across the genres. Music makes up 58% of the arts coverage on the radio programmes monitored, followed by film (15%), and theatre (10%). Together these make up nearly 85% of the arts coverage monitored on radio. The monitoring suggests that literature (5%) and the visual arts (4%) are under-reported on radio, while dance received no coverage during the monitoring period.

Similarly, the monitoring suggests that music (41%) is the most frequently covered genre on television, followed by film (21%), visual arts (12%) and theatre (11%). Together these make up 85% of the editorial content items monitored. Dance (4%) and literature (3%) are infrequently covered on television.

6.3 Breakdown of key arts genres

6.3.1 Music

Graph 7



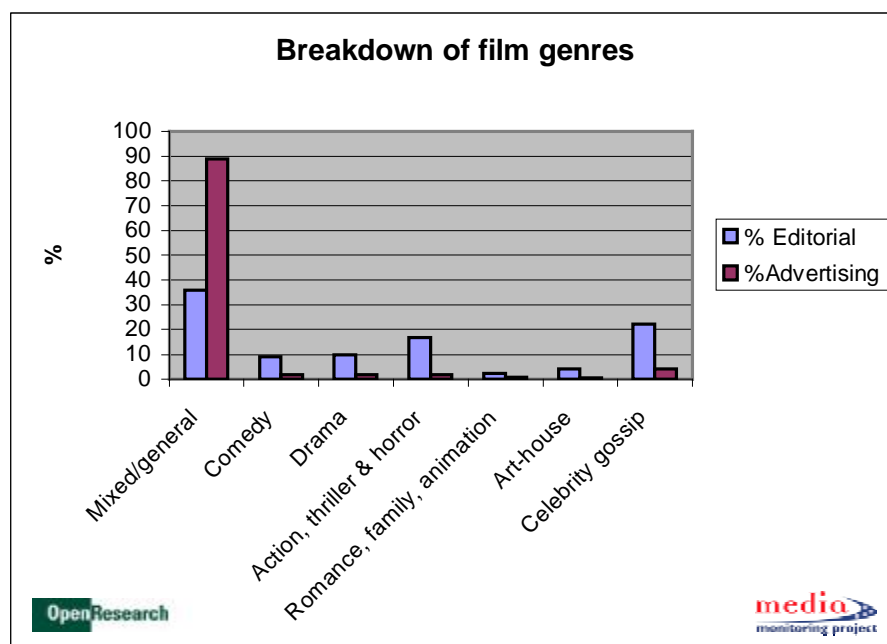
Graph 7 shows that pop music (18%) is the most frequently covered music genre. Reggae, kwaito and hip-hop (11%), classical music (11%), jazz (9%) and rock and indy (9%) are covered more or less with the same frequency. Coverage of some of these genres may be boosted by a particular media’s emphasis of that genre, rather than indicate widespread coverage across all of the media monitored. For example, Beeld specifically emphasizes classical music in its coverage. The results suggest that

both choral music (4%) and traditional music (4%) are under-reported generally. 10% of music coverage can be considered celebrity gossip.

While coverage of pop music dominates music coverage, the advertising count shows that 31% of all music advertised in the media monitored is for pop music. Jazz, reggae, kwaito and hip-hop and rock and indy music are covered despite the low frequency of advertising for these genres.

6.3.2 Film

Graph 8



Although film is the second most frequently covered arts genre, graph 8 suggests that film coverage is dominated by ‘what’s on’ listings (36%). These listings include short review briefs that serve as a guide, and mostly include some form of editorial rating. Similarly, film advertising is dominated by paid-for film listings (89%).

Film celebrity gossip makes up 22% of the remaining editorial content items, while entertainment-orientated action, thrillers and horrors films (17%) are the most frequently covered of the film genres. Films that can be categorized as drama make up 10% of the total film count, and comedy 9%.

The frequency of advertising for the specific film genres is more or less the same, ranging from 1-2% of the total frequency of advertisements placed. Advertisements for art-house films did not feature during the monitored periods.

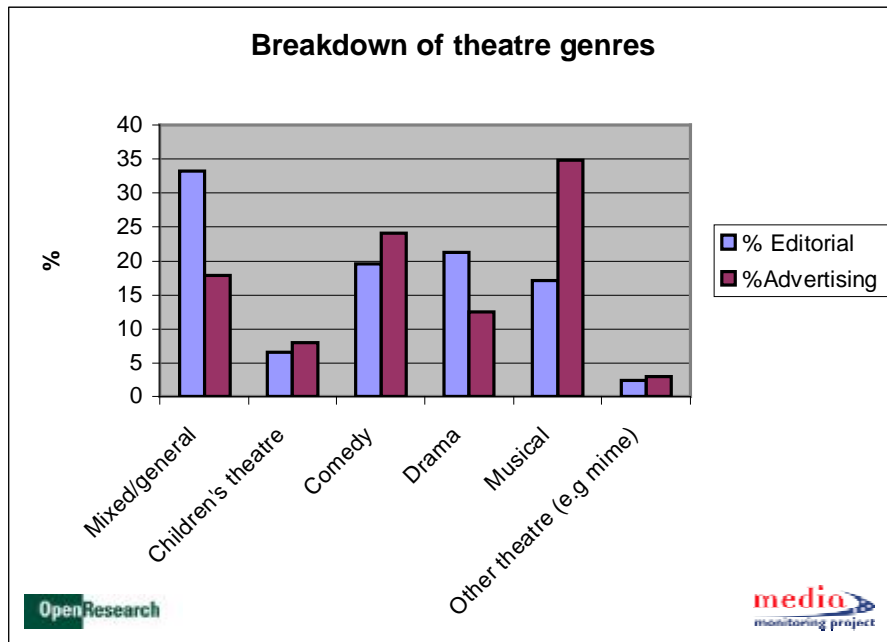
6.3.3 Theatre

Graph 9 shows that while content items dealing with mixed genres dominate theatre coverage (33%), comedy (20%), drama (21%) and musicals (17%) are covered with

more or less the same frequency. Children's theatre accounts for 7% of the theatre content count.

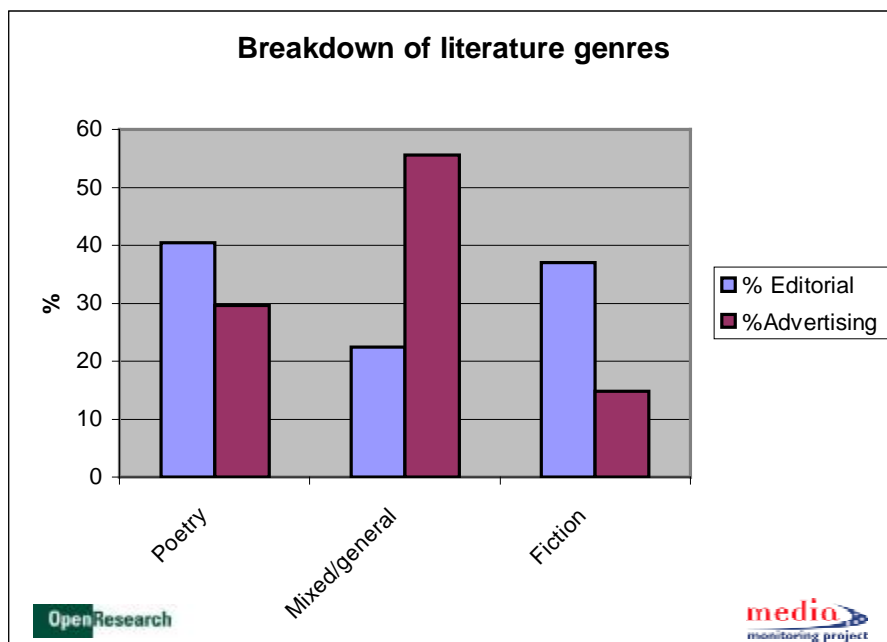
Advertising for theatre productions, which is the most frequent of all arts advertising, is dominated by the entertainment genres, such as musicals (35%) and comedy (24%).

Graph 9



6.3.4 Literature

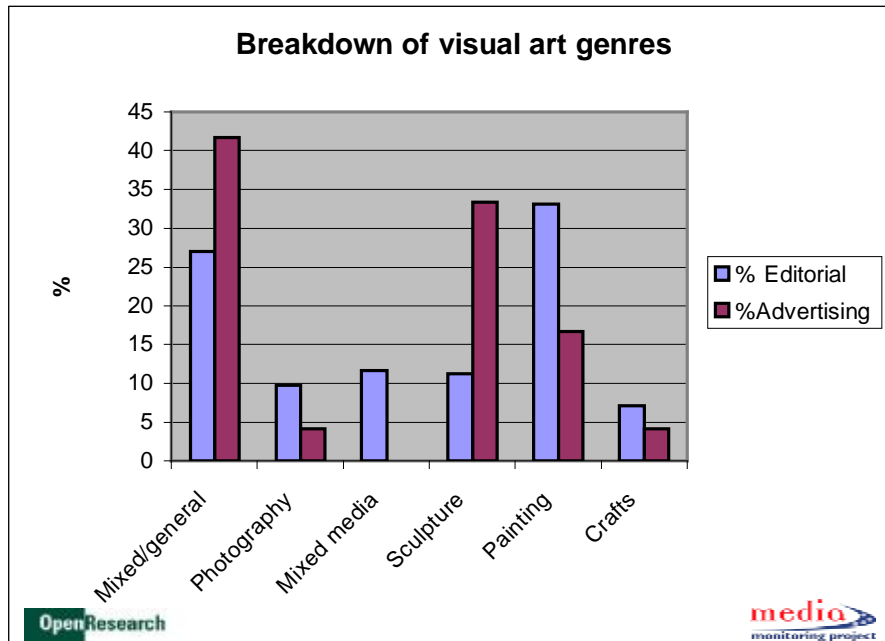
Graph 10



Graph 10 shows that poetry accounted for 40% of the editorial content items for the literature genres. This includes coverage of performance poetry, as well as the content count for poems printed in newspapers. In comparison, coverage of fiction accounted for 37% of the content items. The frequency of advertisements for poetry and fiction is low and accounts for only 4% of the content count for advertisements for all arts genres, or 27 advertisements in total.

6.3.5 Visual arts

Graph 11

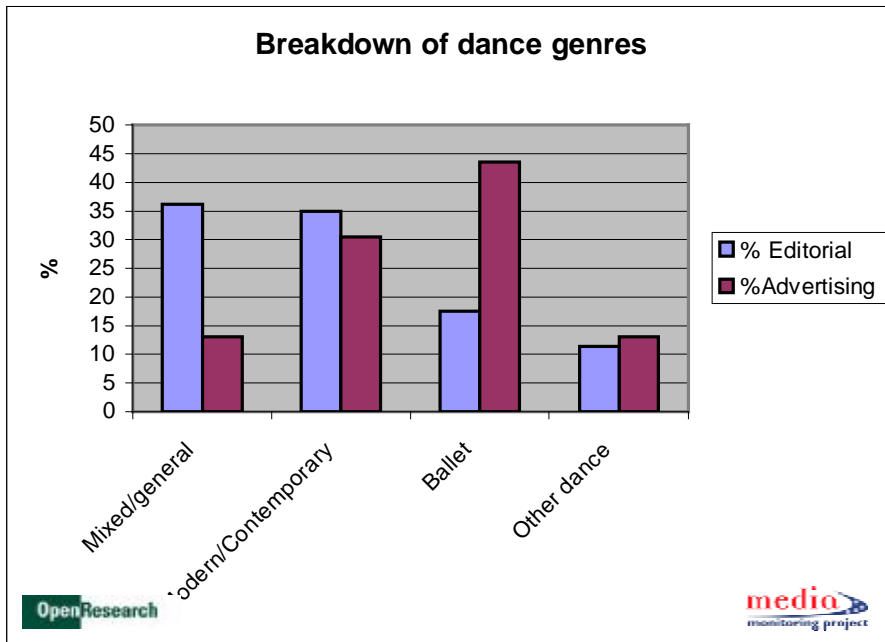


While the visual arts account for only 8% of all editorial content, coverage is dominated by painting (34%) and editorial that deals with mixed genres (27%). Mixed media (12%), photography (10%) and sculpture (11%) are covered with roughly the same frequency. Although generally low, 10% of the advertising for the visual arts advertises mixed genres (e.g. an exhibition of sculptures, paintings and mixed media).

6.3.6 Dance

Graph 12 suggests that when dance is covered, mixed genres are the most frequently covered (36%) followed by modern or contemporary dance (35%) and ballet (18%). Stated differently, modern or contemporary dance is covered twice as often as ballet. However, ballet (43%) is advertised more frequently than contemporary or modern dance (30%).

Graph 12



7. The arts, entertainment, and lifestyle

While it is common for both editors and journalists to refer to themselves as arts editors or arts journalists, the arts is less frequently used on its own to signify content in the media.⁶ The interviews conducted for this study suggested a number of reasons for this, including challenges around defining the arts⁷ (“what’s art?”), ideological objections to the use of the term, and the notion that ‘the arts don’t sell’.

7.1 Selling the arts

We must be very careful on the radio, the moment you use the words “arts” or “culture”, the listeners go “ohh...”. So you try to disguise it in a more informal way. I think it’s part of the arts’ problem, because they’ve position themselves outside of the mainstream (Johnson, 2005. Int.).

Informants argued that the arts are a niche market, and, as result, there is little reader or audience interest in arts coverage. This is said to be supported by audience ratings and reader surveys. For example, despite its recognition that it needs to “do more” for the arts, licensing fees and grants from government only cover some of the SABC’s programming costs (MM, 2005. Int.). Low ratings reported for arts programming, on the other hand, “[pose] a challenge in terms of advertising” (Trout, 2005. Int.):

Firstly programming of this nature is niche and does not always appeal to the masses, therefore the audience ratings are usually not huge. Programming such as the National Arts Festival and Aardklop that were scheduled on SABC 2 in June 2005, did not deliver big audience ratings and we were not able to secure a sponsor. (Ibid.)

While wetlands of serious arts coverage⁸ still remain in the media, coverage is frequently collapsed – and diluted – into catch-all ‘entertainment’ or ‘lifestyle’ or, in some instances, ‘culture’ categories that are seen to appeal to a broader audience or readership.

⁶ One exception is Arts Guide, a “what’s on” listing included in the *Sunday Times’s* Metro (enigmatically, it is just called “The Guide” in the strap line). Other exceptions, however, tend to prove the rule rather than contradict it. For instance, *Business Day* has an “Arts & Leisure” column, *The Herald* has an “Arts and Entertainment” section and the *Independent on Saturday* has an “Arts and Pleasure” section. The avoidance of the arts to signify content does not indicate an avoidance of arts coverage, but, rather, suggests a difficulty with the term used on its own. In contrast, sub-categories of the arts are frequently used. These include Performing arts, theatre’, music, books, movies, or art, meaning the visual arts, as in *Business Day* Art. However, similar to the arts, literature is seldom used.

⁷ For instance, one informant suggested it was easier to say what art is not, than what it is. (Greig, 2005. Int.)

⁸ As used in this study, serious arts coverage refers loosely to coverage that attempts to engage with artistic production, rather than simply reflecting it as an event. For instance, it excludes (much) publicity material and celebrity gossip.

By definition, many supplements or programmes that feature arts coverage see themselves as entertainment, rather than arts supplements, or as hybrid “arts/culture/entertainment” supplements (Smith, 2005. e-Int.). These contain as their standard fare: “Soap Box, cover story, CD reviews, calendar, DVD reviews, movie reviews, crossword/puzzles, television features, 7 days of television listings, PS” (Ibid.).

The arts are then presented in a way that is appropriate to this new categorisation.⁹ Frequently they are “reduced to a diversion” (Memela, 2005. Int.), or, when they are covered are “put in the ‘good cause’ bracket” (Ansell, 2005. Int.).

[The arts] are quite different to entertainment. Something like *African Footprints* might straddle several categories, but the general idea is that the performing and creative arts are some sort of indulgence and you should, nowadays, make as little as space for them as possible...The result is a banal American kind of time filler. It’s about passing the time, and not really enlarging people’s worldviews or questioning. (Accone, 2005. Int.)

Arts coverage is said to be particularly vulnerable when a publication or broadcaster ‘repositions itself’ to capture a bigger share of a market or when its financial profitability is threatened. For instance, this was the sense when *The Star’s Tonight* changed its focus (in 2000):

They [the media managers at *The Star*] wanted to concentrate on TV, and on music and maybe film. Music fitted in with a younger age group – it was a youth policy, celebrity-driven, dumbing down; a relentless downward spiral. It had been difficult to get to things like theatre, contemporary dance going or serious, non-popular music. Fine arts I had to ditch completely, in terms of ever-restricting budgets. (Ibid.)

While a re-think of editorial strategy since the beginning of 2005 has meant that the *Tonight* does offer pockets of good arts coverage – and has retained one of the most experienced dance journalists in the country – it continues to see itself as an entertainment supplement in its efforts to attract a 17-25 year-old age group (with a 55% black readership). While recognizing that there has been a regeneration of interest in the arts in South Africa, and that “classical music is flourishing in the townships” the *Tonight* “[does] not put opera and dance on front page”.¹⁰ (Walker, 2005. Int.)

⁹ For example, in some instances the arts are presented as a lifestyle choice or aspiration, as a consumer product (the latest movie, show or CD release are presented without any critical intervention) or there is an emphasis on television, celebrity gossip, promotional material and cut-and-paste snippets from international entertainment news feeds.

¹⁰ During the course of this study, dance coverage did appear on the front page of the *Tonight* (May 31, 2005). However, this and other instances are taken to be the exception.

Arts coverage was also the first to be swept out the door when the now defunct *ThisDay* – which initially targeted the intellectual reader – hit rough financial waters:

The business model was very bad. When you saw the shrinkage, with the page numbers being reduced, everyone lost pages. There was a huge fight every day. Arts gets cut first. It's what always seems to happen everywhere. Features shrunk and arts shrunk. The glaring lost opportunity was their Friday supplement. They didn't have to do the culture and entertainment. Book pages were increasingly difficult for [the books editor]...Towards the end they were thinking they needed to re-invent the paper. Then they began thinking it should be like *The Independent* in London, a tabloid shape. It became very erratic and quite unpredictable. The arts section never really improved, and got even worse actually. (Accone, 2005. Int.)

That “the arts are the first to go” is also illustrated by the fate of e-tv's e-Arts. While potentially offering a radical re-evaluation of the newsworthiness of the arts given that e-tv was the “first and only local station to include arts coverage in their news broadcasts” (Greenwall, 2005. Int.), e-Arts was dropped in line with other content changes at the broadcaster:

e-Arts appealed primarily to older, upper-income viewers. e-tv's strategic focus shifted to younger middle-income viewers and, as a result, its news coverage (including arts and entertainment) had to change to appeal to a broader audience. We initially revised the show (under the name Nightlife) to cover entertainment events, which were coming up over the weekend. However, this year we decided to go for a much newsier approach, covering entertainment and showbiz news (local and international) in the Showbiz Report... There is definitely a gap in the market for this kind of show and our recent ratings [The Showbiz Report has adult ratings of 6 plus] reflect that. (Ibid.)

Tellingly, while it may have ratings to support the Showbiz Report, the broadcaster¹¹ says it had no audience ratings to justify dropping e-Arts:

We are unable to determine the ratings for *e-Arts* because this slot was part of our news bulletins. Ratings are assessed on programmes as a whole and not segments within those programmes. (Keene-Young, 2005. Int.)

When the arts are reported with any seriousness, they need to be ‘dressed up’ and made more exciting and accessible.¹² While informants suggested the arts are

¹¹ e-tv's core target market is under 45-year-olds with an LSM of 5 to 7.

¹² While the arts can be visual, an emphasis on the visual is often at the expense of editorial. One informant called this the “tabloid” approach with “huge chunks of headline and no text. Everything is like a caption and extremely superficial.” (Accone, 2005. Int.)

treated with more sensitivity in the Afrikaans print media, *Beeld's Plus* says its readers prefer a visual appeal to the supplement:

The print media is changing, becoming more reader-friendly. There are more photographs being used. The *New York Times* way of doing things – stark copy, black and white pictures – those days are gone. Definitely for *Beeld..Plus* is moving strongly in the direction [of becoming] entertaining. We resist stories on the cover, and they like that. It's part of the identity, putting a picture on the front page. (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)

Similarly, while the *Sunday Times's* Metro is one of the rare examples of growth of arts coverage in the media,¹³ its confidence in “the arts for the arts' sake” is tentative:

To make the publication more exciting, we have “Metro People” – “My Jo'burg”, “My Vereeniging” - a back page Q&A. We also have the ‘Breakfast Bandit’ – an alternative kind of review of restaurants. Then, because it's meant to be a publication for younger readers, we will have a section for ‘hip’ people, for lack of better word. So there's the “Beautiful young things” section, which is about where young people go. (Rangongo, 2005. Int.)

The treatment given to the arts is to some extent suggested by the quantitative findings. While arts coverage is dominated by the arts that can be more readily presented as entertainment (such as music or film which make up 35% of all editorial content items monitored), 16% of coverage in arts supplements was coverage of television. Celebrity gossip, pop culture and lifestyle content made up 12% of the editorial content items monitored in the arts supplements or programmes.

7.2 The role of advertisers

Informants suggested that one of the key challenges to good arts coverage lies with the advertising industry, and the media's dependency on advertising, rather than the public's likes and dislikes or interests:

Papers begin with a readership profile – determined by what they can buy. This determines what is appropriate for ‘our readers’. They don't say: ‘Let us discover what they are interested in.’ (Ansell, 2005. Int.)

The coupling of the arts with lifestyle or entertainment content is more appealing to advertisers:

¹³ SABC 3's *The World Today* has also introduced arts coverage into its programme line-up. Arts content is described as “not heavy”. (Lewington, 2005. Int.) Since the interviews for this study were conducted, the *Mail & Guardian* relaunched its Friday supplement, with some improvement in the amount of space given to arts coverage.

Unless a brand has a specific objective (i.e. Nedbank and Rand Merchant Bank have always associated their brands with arts and culture) the client base in terms of suitable potential advertisers is always very limited. Lifestyle programming on the other hand has a wider appeal and is usually a lot more exciting and provides various kinds of opportunities for brands to associate and integrate with. Programming such as Die Nutsman (a DIY show), currently sponsored by Plascon and Bosch, and Weekend Live (a news, current affairs show with a lifestyle look and feel on SABC 2) are always programmes of choice for advertisers. (Trout, 2005. Int.)

In this context, journalists are encouraged to imagine the average media consumer in a number of guises:

Our editor says if you look at our readers, they're people sitting on pavilion at Lofters...A majority of readers love rugby and do not read about ballet and classical music. (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)

We're told that the young up-and-coming black market is aspirational, extremely interested in celebrity, the better lifestyle, in material things. Interested in TV, gossip, and topics of the day. Extremely interested in sport. (De Klerk, J. 2005. Int.)

Any newspaper editor will tell you you're writing for somebody who has a standard six sitting on a toilet reading the paper. (Pretorius, 2005. Int.)

The newsworthiness of the arts is determined by notions of the "entertainment habits" of most people:

The Showbiz Report aims to reflect the entertainment habits of our audience. We are the country's only dedicated entertainment news show - but we aren't just there to inform our audiences, our primary objective is to entertain... Our goal is to reflect what local audiences are buying into. (Greenwall, 2005. Int.)

News selection is dictated by a target market rather than the importance of the arts, or any single artistic production:

A tight format is laid down from above. Our market is pretty well defined for us. We are expected to choose what we think will appeal to specific market. If it doesn't appeal to that, it just won't get in... We would be told to take art out. (De Klerk, J. 2005. Int.)

It needs to be of national interest, and then interest and access are almost equivalent. Can people in the Cape, KZN and Gauteng access it? If it's a book, then will it be available at all branches? Or is it a self-published, slim volume of poetry, that's only going to be sold one night at a poetry recital? It doesn't matter how brilliant or ground

breaking it is, we're going to say sorry, if Brenda Fassie's new recordings are coming in next week, we're going to publish that. (Krouse, 2005. Int.)

In particular, it was felt that the black media consumer was misunderstood:¹⁴

We have what I would call the "kwaitorisation" of arts and culture reporting. Everything is done from a kwaito perspective. The term 'kwaito' means black, urban youth. Not all arts are black, urban youth...It's not a true reflection. (Journ., 2005. Int.)

The advertising industry is very white. They have seen a problem; they are working on it. A lot of stations [are] feeling the pinch. Tie manufacturers – they say black people don't buy ties, don't use paint. (Pope, 2005. Int.)

Informants reported that an average of 40-60% of the potential space for editorial in the supplements monitored is taken up by advertising.

In general, the arts are the biggest advertisers in supplements or programmes where the arts typically appear. Other prominent products or services advertised included food, business and finance, travel and technology.¹⁵

¹⁴ Although this could not be verified, one informant questioned why luxury car manufacturers – such as BMW – seldom, if ever, use black people in their advertisements, when it was clear that many black people drove luxury cars.

¹⁵ For a full list of the products advertised, please see Appendix 4.

8. Race, culture, and the arts

8.1 Arts versus culture

We place such a heavy emphasis on the word culture with a capital "C", and that's because of some of the political debates I suppose that have preceded the era we're living in. (Krouse, 2005. Int.)

In contrast to the arts, culture is more readily used on its own to signify media content that may include arts coverage. For instance, the *Sunday Independent's* Culture pages, or the SABC 2's Curious Culture – both of which specifically focus on the arts.

There were varied responses to the question put to informants on their understanding of 'art' and 'culture', and the relationship between the two. For one informant – and more or less in line with the distinction adopted by the Department of Arts and Culture¹⁶ – art is dynamic and transforms culture, which is static. In this sense, art plays a crucial role in building a post-apartheid multicultural society and offers something of a remedy against "people who do not want to let go of the past" (Memela, 2005. Int.).

By implication, the SABC's regional broadcasters (such as Thobela FM, Motswedding FM and Umhlobo Wenene FM) see art as reinforcing culture – arts programming is broadcast if it complements a station's cultural broadcasting mandate (MM, 2005. Int.)

However, most informants felt – for different reasons – that the distinction in the context of arts journalism was problematic: "I don't believe in the divide" (Constant, 2005. Int.)

One editor described the distinction as a "meaningless contention", similar to categories distinguishing arts genres. Arts genres are seen to be organically linked, and culture can be defined as the way a subject is approached. In the context of the media, what we regarded as culture has various essential ingredients. These included an historical understanding and context, an assumption that "it matters", and an implicit acknowledgement that the issues being dealt with are complex, and cannot be covered properly in limited space. In this way, the answer to 'what is arts and cultural reporting?' is answered through "process" rather than categorization. (Greig, 2005. Int.)

¹⁶ According to definitions in the department's White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage: "Arts refer to but are not restricted to all forms and traditions of dance, drama, music, music theatre, visual arts, crafts, design, written and oral literature all of which serve as means for individual and collective creativity and expression through performance, execution, presentation, exhibition, transmission and study...Culture refers to the dynamic totality of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features which characterise a society or social group. It includes the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, heritage and beliefs developed over time and subject to change." (DAC White Paper, Chapter 1.12, 1996)

There were suggestions that the distinction itself is culturally biased, and serves to create an artificial separation that distorted the function, meaning and relevance of art in society:

Long before some smart critic today or arts installer went the multi-media way, African people, in the not so distant past, [never had] a separation of cultural expression... For us it became a shock, somehow... [when] western cultural expression said the artist is there, the fine artist there, the fashion designer there, exhibits there, musicians there. For me it's like: "What's this? We've always done this together." So I'm interested in culture, created by the masses. (Madondo, 2005. Int.)

With dance, you're looking at very deeply engrained cultural things: the idea of having something on stage where you're clearly separated physically from your audience, and there's an absolute boundary you cannot cross. The players are up there, the audience is here...It's so antithetical in the way stories are told and transmitted and the way in which culture is conveyed and narratives are acted out in African society, where there's no division. (Accone, 2005. Int.)

The assumptions inherent in the distinctions between art and culture (or art and audience) need to be resisted, as do the formal codes of journalism that accompanied art, such as art criticism (as one interviewee put it: the critic as "critick"). An inherited (or western or white) notion of what art should be, predetermines how the public should respond to art. This was for one informant particularly apparent when training students in arts journalism:

Fourth year drama students find it odd and alienating... They feel terribly surprised if, even at the Market Theatre, when the audience reacted in a natural way to what's going on on-stage – hisses and whistles – it's enormously difficult for them. It's going to have an effect on the way you think about a review and write about things. (Ibid.)

While most informants accepted that they could be called arts journalists or arts editors, some felt that it was inadequate to describe the journalistic agenda:

I used to be what you'd call an "arts and culture" writer. Over the years I decided I wanted to be a cultural writer. In that sense I can go beyond the traditional definitions of the arts. (Madondo, 2005. Int.)

A more fluid understanding of art's function in society and its relationship to cultural change is necessary. With that, the role of the arts journalist is broadened. For example, arts coverage becomes a matter of recording contemporary cultural as well as recovering an undocumented heritage –it becomes a political or ideological act of reconstruction and redefinition of the contemporary:

The 'arts' part of arts and culture was traditionally learned, or dominated by a particular sect of people. For me that was problematic. I think the greater part of South Africa's population - which is African people, black people - they've created a very, very vibrant, a particularly important culture; a sort of a mobile culture, which is both contemporary and historical. And that culture forms part of their heritage; their definitions now, how they express themselves. And it goes beyond the concept of arts and culture. (Ibid.)

There are artists who have never been covered or given due respect by the white media galleries; that have been neglected, the black arts and culture iconography...My job as a researcher, as a journalist, is to say: 'Hey, let's go find out what happened and how'. You can't talk about the future of arts without looking where you've come from. (Ibid.)

For some, the distinction between arts and culture is particularly laden in the South African context:

They're not mutually exclusive. Bernard Jay from the Civic, said in public address that when he got to South Africa [from the United Kingdom] he was ill-equipped for the idea of 'arts and culture' - for him it was 'arts and entertainment'. (Krouse, 2005. Int.)

A more contemporary notion of what arts and culture means is necessary, and should include the idea of the arts alongside other lifestyle choices:

The area of culture and arts has broadened to include things like lifestyle choices - [it's an] inclusive idea of what art and culture is, a very much more contemporary idea. Even though there are old stalwarts who want it to be the way it was all the time, they have to understand that low-fat muffins are now just as important to some people as worker theatre. So travel is part of it too. People want to know what to spend their money on and what's happening in other necks of the woods, because the world is getting smaller. (Ibid.)

8.2 Race and news selection

Informants suggested that a cross-cultural appreciation of the arts is growing:

There's this thing about black media, English media, Afrikaans media: I don't buy that. I got a picture of Rocky Horror, when Rocky was on, of this white boy in this little tango in the Sowetan. I asked [the editor] and he said everybody should be given a chance to know what's on. It's that segmentation that people need to move away from. Everyone must get everything. I know some publicists, if a show is opening with a white

performer, they might not even invite the Sunday World or Sowetan, but why not? (Publicist, 2005. Int.)

South Africans are very inquisitive. You can't play the age and race game. They are getting younger and younger. There were a lot of young people at *Cards*. This one guy thought he was at a kwaito concert. You could see they had very rarely been to theatre, but they were there in their droves. That's the new audience. And they could pay. They may not book at Computicket, but they would walk in and they would pay. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

Notions of newsworthiness based on cultural assumptions of relevance need to be challenged:

I don't allow [the issue of race] to cloud my judgment. I know of a lot of black people, who love opera, and who love ballet; who take their kids to ballet lessons. In Alexandra, now, there is a ballet school. If we were to be narrow and say: 'The majority of our readership is black, this is what we are going to do: kwaito and hip-hop' we would be wrong, because people have different tastes and you have to cater for that. Once you become narrow, you actually annoy people. You have to open up and be bold. And it's working. Initially, I agree, we thought it was risky; but from the feedback we're getting and the response from the arts community, it's been phenomenal. (Rangongo, 2005. Int.)

It's how we cover it that's an issue. In the same way that an event by Tony Leon is not done for DA [Democratic Alliance] supporters only. If you explain to people why something happens and its relevance in the broader context of South Africa, then you start going somewhere. (Journ., 2005. Int.)

At the very least, the media has an obligation to constantly assess its assumptions of cultural relevance when it comes to the arts:

If you don't consciously look at race, and pretend it doesn't exist, then there's a problem...You can't have colonialism, then ten years down the line expect all these inherent things to have gone away. (Journ., 2005. Int.)

While cultural assumptions around the appreciation of the arts are changing, news selection is often aligned with the predominant race of a target market or audience. For instance, Kaya FM, which has a 78% black listenership, focuses "mainly on black artists [and entertainers] in general" (Johnson, 2005. Int.).¹⁷

¹⁷ While the station does a "gig guide" it is said to be still "quite white" (Johnson, 2005. Int.). While the Tonight has a predominantly black readership, the majority of the 23 000 subscribers to Artslink.co.za are also black. According to Artslink, subscription preferences include music (especially jazz), serious, intellectual theatre (not entertainment), craft, literature and poetry.

Similarly, *City Press* focuses mainly on black artists:

Our editorial choices lean towards black artists and black expressions of art, but this is not always possible or desirable. For instance we have done pieces on Nathaniel, Mike van Graan's plays, etc. We've even had a Danny K. cover. But we do have to be sensitive to the needs of our readers who make themselves heard when they feel that we're becoming "too white". We also see ourselves as tasked with reflecting the EXPLOSION in the arts and providing a platform for the varied and wonderful artistic expressions emerging in [South Africa] every day. And to this extent we also want to celebrate the growth in black art - in film-making, fine art, dance, music, theatre, etc. (Smith, 2005. e-Int.)

8.3 The avoidance of cultural debates

Informants suggested that cultural debates, using the arts as a catalyst, were seldom taking place in the media. Cultural debates are more prevalent in media where cultural issues, broadly defined, are seen to be close to the concerns of a target readership or audience:

Afrikaans media is closer to culture...The Afrikaans press still looks for creative products as an expression of society. (Pretorius, 2005. Int.)

Historically, Afrikaans writers played political roles in what happened later, in bringing the Afrikaner around to become part of a more democratic layer of thinking. So they have become icons, important figures in Afrikanerdom. (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)¹⁸

When you say culture, culture is part of the politics. It is political; it has been politicised for so long. Separately, outside of arts and culture, when we address issues [at the station], they're political issues, even though they may be mainstream development or social issues, there's always a political angle. (Johnson, 2005. Int.)

[Our station is about] shaping identity, opening mind-sets, changing people's minds, that sort of thing - reflecting what is happening in country at the moment. (Pope, 2005. Int.)

For some, a vestige of these debates survive as part of a marketed or felt identity:

The *M&G*, with its very conscientious line of arts editors, did what was politically correct in the "old South Africa", and ran cultural debates as they happened. There're a lot less debates now, but that sort of identity has stuck. (Krouse, 2005. Int.)

¹⁸ Commenting on the prominence given to Afrikaans writers in the Afrikaans media.

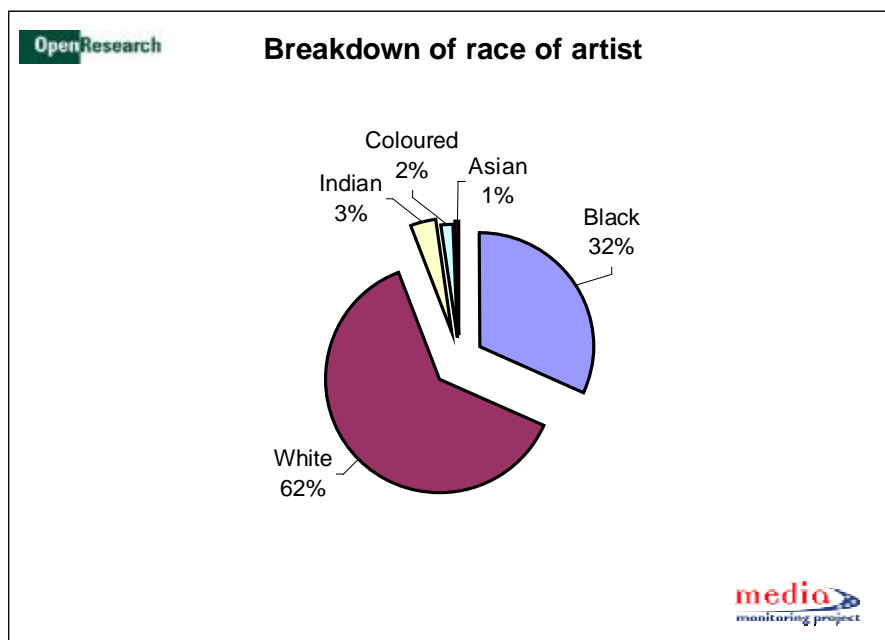
However, it was mostly held that debates about the role of art and the artist in cultural change in South Africa in the new millennium have largely been ignored:

It's very awkward to negotiate. It's been convenient not to deal with this, simply by removing arts entirely, and upgrading to entertainment....To a degree, editors are very happy not to have some kind of cultural warfare or race warfare breaking out on their entertainment pages. It's a very typical kind of 'shelve this and try ignore it' attitude. It should really be confronted. [The arts] should be very much a forerunner of a whole lot of social and cultural issues and discussions. So there's this terrible vacuum; there's no real forum for public intellectual discussion in South African newspapers, and that's a huge problem. (Accone, 2005. Int.)

8.4 Race and gender of sources

Graph 13 below shows the count for the race of the artists as sources in the content monitored.¹⁹ As can be seen, the majority of the sources for media coverage of the arts were white artists. The extent to which this reflects a general media bias towards white artists is beyond the scope of this study. It will, however, be influenced by the selection of international content (such as some Hollywood celebrity gossip), and the simultaneous scarcity of coverage of the arts from the rest of Africa (discussed in 13).

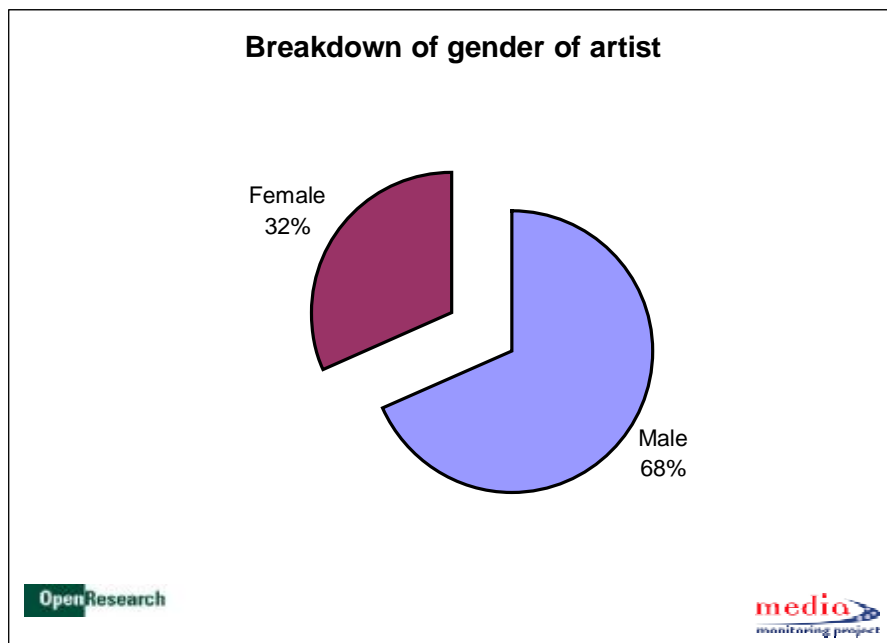
Graph 13



¹⁹ When it could be easily ascertained. For instance, an interview with a black jazz musician would be added under the "black" count. If two musicians are interviewed in the same article, they would each be counted separately. When the race of the artist/s was uncertain, it would be counted as 'unknown'. This category is not represented in the graph.

Graph 14 shows a similar bias in our count of the gender of artists as sources. The gender breakdown, while biased towards male sources, shows a better gender balance than coverage monitored in other research conducted by the MMP. It suggests that female sources are accessed around 15% more frequently (or twice as often) in arts coverage compared to the average typically found in general news coverage of important public events, such as elections. For example, during the 1999 elections, female sources comprised just 10% of all people accessed during the monitored period. In 2004, during the national elections, female sources comprised 23% of all people accessed.

Graph 14



9. The role of the arts journalist

Informants pointed out a shift in the treatment of the arts in South Africa since 1994. While many artists (and arts journalists) could conceive of their work as having a clear purpose during the anti-apartheid struggle,²⁰ this sense of collective purpose has quickly evaporated.

In the 80s, repression in the country was increasing, and in this context culture assumed more prominence. With general forms of political activity quite restricted, culture forums replaced mass rallies. It was no longer seen as one of those things when the odd poem was read to lighten things up. It now became more respectable. There were major cultural festivals in the middle of the state of emergency. Some of them were banned before they took place. At that time, culture happened in the context of a broad mass democratic movement. Mass rallies happened anyway in community halls or centres. Plays happened in context of audiences that came for those particular issues. (van Graan, 2005. Int.)

The rise of cultural organisations in the mid-80s was made possible through international funding. While fuelling a political cause, it was crucial in allowing artists to do what they did best:

During the struggle, it was a quick way to make a living. Everyone wanted to be an artist, because at least you could feed yourself. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

However, the new democracy brought a shift in funding patterns, which either “went back to Europe to East European countries to make sure there wouldn’t be a flood of refugees” (van Graan, 2005. Int.), or was centralized through the new ANC-led government.

With this centralisation of funding, which cut many artists off from their financial lifeline, a new era of what some call the ‘commodification of culture’ was ushered in. Part of this involved the professionalisation of the arts, which were shifted from centre-stage to the fringes of cultural and political change. Artists now had to turn to the new South African market to pay their way, sometimes with devastating consequences:

In the context of GEAR [Growth, Employment and Redistribution] arts people needed to justify their existence and validity in terms of where they are getting their market. There are four areas of concentration: craft, film, publishing and contemporary music. With that strategy came the neglect of all other areas, including the performing arts. The decline came from 1998 onwards, with the State

²⁰ As one informant suggested, for some arts journalists it was the preservation of “high culture”, rather than cultural change.

Theatre closing down. Unless a work of art has a market, it has no validity. (Ibid.)

While much has been said about the impact political change had on artists,²¹ less has been said how the end to apartheid ushered in new questions for arts journalists:

Some of the arts journalists, we were the link; from some artists to other artists, from those artists to the public. It was a political role. Something like *Tonight* had masses of space in those days, and you could use it, and show other people what they were doing. I suppose it was an activist role, a political role, depending on the individual. I remember in Grahamstown, I couldn't use the words 'resistance art'. We got blacked out. We had huge responsibilities. Artists could get their houses burnt down or killed, if they were performing in the wrong spaces or getting dirty money. We had to be aware of that stuff. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

In contrast, in 2005, most informants accepted that the role of the journalist has shifted. What one commentator has called a "Chinese wall" between advertising and editorial – "an imaginary barrier that separates the two entities and immunises each from the other" (Harber, 2005) – has all but vanished.

Many journalists now accept, at least in part, that their job is to keep one eye on the target market as they shape and select content, and that their professional survival is dependent on the media's ability to attract advertising. While research suggests that this has impacted on hard news coverage, such as coverage of HIV/AIDS,²² it appears to be no different for the arts:

When you get down to practicalities, your job is to sell newspapers. The responsible journalist will try within these parameters to do a responsible job. (De Klerk, J. 2005. Int.)

What a "responsible job" meant differed from informant to informant. For instance, there were conflicting opinions about whether or not the media has a responsibility to make more space for better arts coverage. On the one hand, it was suggested that more arts coverage would appeal only to the artist community: "*Tonight* is not a trade magazine. The artists are listening in on what others are saying about them." (Walker, 2005. Int.). In this sense, artistic production becomes just another product that needs to be marketed alongside "low-fat muffins" and L'Oreal shampoo, as it competes for shrinking media space and editors' attention (no matter how well-intentioned):

²¹ For instance, see *Soweto Blues* (2004) by Gwen Ansell, where she discusses the impact Albie Sachs's controversial article in the then *Weekly Mail* in 1990 had on artists: "many artists, writers, and musicians were devastated. 'It felt like being kicked in the guts,' said Dennis Mpale, 'like no one valued what we had done. And like there was going to be nothing for us to do in the future.'" (p263). In the article, Sachs, amongst other things, criticised art in the service of the struggle.

²² See, for instance, Finlay, 2004.

The media has no moral, ethical or communal duty or responsibility to the artistic community. The arts are as competitive as any other arena and South African artists need to grow up and GET IT. Self-indulgent whinging about journalists being lazy or indifferent will get them nowhere. We WANT to know about your work, we WANT to write about it, we WANT to give you press and airtime, but we also want to maintain standards and give the reading public QUALITY (Smith, 2005. e-Int.).

In contrast, others felt that good arts coverage needed to be defended, and that the media have a responsibility towards the public. What one editor called an “assault on intellectual copy” – he is frequently told his articles are too long, or too “highbrow” – showed a “deprecatory attitude towards readers” (Greig, 2005. Int.). Informants felt that it was an assumption about readers that was “insulting” (Ibid.) and patronising:

It’s extremely patronising to assume people have limited attention spans and don’t have the ability to absorb more, or the apparatus to question more or want more. You can’t patronize and under-estimate your reader. Especially here, people want to read more and know more, not less... If you look at the way in which [some media] tend to sensationalize things, the kinds of stories they choose to run as lead stories, it’s all commercial. They are not giving people any proper basis on which to understand the country and make decisions. (Accone, 2005. Int.)

For some, a sense of the arts journalist as activist remained, now as the articulator of a new cultural hegemony:

Black artists do not hold the sole preserve of what we call African culture. Even I as a white boy can do African culture. People are going to slip in and out of a dominant black culture, creating a unique African culture, which is African, which has multiple identities. Those who resist it are going to fall by the wayside. Youth culture is black, period. Black is the future. Black is multiple identities and attitudes, and this is where we are going to. (Madondo, 2005. Int.)

10. The critic, the reporter, and the publicist

While there are different kinds of arts journalism, such as criticism, reporting, opinion and commentary, or even publicity, a number of informants pointed out that the formal distinctions between these as separate but related disciplines were not clearly felt in the media. Instead, there are “fewer people doing more things” (Greig, 2005. Int.).

For example, it is not uncommon for arts editors to be critics and reporters, conducting interviews or writing features, and throwing in a bit of publicity for the pages they are tasked to edit. While this is frequently a result of conditions in the newsroom outside of the editors’ control,²³ a consequence is that the specific needs of each journalistic discipline can often not be properly practiced.

10.1 The critic

The notion of the critic is being eroded. (Greig, 2005. Int.)

10.1.1 Culture and criticism

Informants had differing views on the relevance of traditional arts criticism in contemporary South Africa. For some, it is a “luxury”, an “ivory tower” (Sichel, 2005. Int.), which does not properly account for the unique role of the arts journalist (for instance, as cultural activist). Similarly, others argue that the social context for formal criticism is gone (Ansell, 2005. Int.). Criticism can only be subjective, as opposed to an objective evaluation of the arts, and at best a “participative criticism” is possible (for example, a music critic who dances to a live band).

These mirror the ideological concerns of the function and nature of art in South Africa discussed above, and pick up on debates about the possibilities of objectivity in journalism generally. For some, the public behaviour of the critic should reflect their responsibility (Greig, 2005 Int.). Norms of behaviour include not accepting hospitality, not clapping at the end of a performance or participating in a standing ovation, as well as not conducting interviews²⁴ or writing promotional material. These are designed to preserve and communicate a sense of neutrality and assist in providing an “informed response to readers, not a spontaneous unconsidered response to fellow members of an audience.”²⁵ (Ibid.)

²³ See Section 14.

²⁴ Interviews are seen to skew the objectivity necessary for criticism in that the interviewer invariably gets “emotionally sucked in”. It is difficult for both criticism and interviews to be done with integrity. (Greig, 2005. Int.)

²⁵ These norms of behaviour are interesting in that they parallel equally unsettled standards of objectivity that govern other forms of journalism; for instance, correspondents reporting from conflict situations. A participative approach to criticism does not, of course, exclude some of these codes of conduct. For instance, most informants agreed that offers of hospitality need to be treated with caution.

Race plays a part in criticism and sometimes raises ideological concerns about the validity of certain kinds of critical perspectives.²⁶ At times this poses challenges, even for experience reporters:

There is always this whole thing about who should write. It cropped up last year – if you're white it's a problem. But I can't think like that. If the work is there, you do it...It's an absolute minefield still. Because you have to be very sensitive, sometimes you expose yourself in reviews in the way you write. You can't be patronizing. There were certain art forms which were evolving, and there were different approaches...It's about a difference. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

While cultural differences are seen to be a catalyst to a unique creativity ("This is what South African performers bring to the world." (Sichel, 2005. Int.)), they also have the potential to inhibit who has access to particular codes of creative expression; for instance, when ritual is incorporated in artistic production:

The sacred space on the stage has been central to South African performance – theatre and dance – since the 70s. Like Brett Bailey's work. I have seen people fall unconscious, because it's real. That's a reality in South African performance. So I, as a journalist, writer and critic, it's my job to reflect that and to be able to learn, to evaluate that work. I have two options: I can say it's absolute crap, or I can try understand it and follow his work. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

How people were raised socially, how we were socialized, black people and white people, affects how we look at the arts. I saw a press release inviting people to come see African ritual. I said: 'We don't do that'. It is sacred as well. You might see it as cutting edge art, but I use it for some purpose, and the purpose is not for it to go beyond my family and clan. The same for arts journalists. Arts journalists are informed by their up-bringing. (Madondo, 2005. Int.)

Conversely, socialisation may mean that a culture of arts criticism, where one is asked to interpret particular art forms, is alien to some:

For white students, because they've grown up in this cultural paradigm, they relate to it better. [With some black students] there is a constant battle between their own cultural imperatives and criteria and the ones that are naturally imbedded and inherent in those art forms. It is a very interesting and uncomfortable position, which in some instances is actually unresolvable. (Accone, 2005. Int.)

²⁶ This was neatly demonstrated in a response to a review of *Zulu Love Letter* by *Mail & Guardian* film critic (and books editor) Shaun de Waal. Grace Musila, a doctoral student of African Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, wrote: "The review's failure to meaningfully engage with the film suggests a severe case of cultural illiteracy, manifest in the reading of local film using interpretative tools distilled from a predominantly Western filmic diet." (*Mail & Guardian*, 02 - 08/09/2005)

10.1.2 "The market" and criticism

The norms of behaviour governing criticism are seen, however, to be under attack from a different quarter: marketers. While the social context for the traditional art critic may have changed, arts criticism has not necessarily evolved as a discipline to meet this new context with a fresh set of guidelines and principles to govern it as a discipline – it is more like it has capitulated.

Good arts critics can wield enormous power: "If a critic [in the *New York Times*], says the play's crap, the play's off." (Sapieka, 2005. Int.). However, the "call and response" between artistic production and arts journalism, so that the media "communicates between practitioners and audience" (Ansell, 2005. Int.), is distorted. What passes as criticism is often thinly veiled publicity, geared to deliver audiences to theatre houses or cinemas.

Words like "corruption" are used frequently in this context; and it is true that arts journalism is not the only kind of journalism to become "corrupted". Technology, motor and travel journalism are other arenas which tread a fine line between 'freebies' – gadgets to review, cars to test drive, trips overseas, launches in exotic locations – and freedom of the press.

However, when something can be sold, it impacts on how things are told. For instance, one informant suggested that music journalists are particularly vulnerable:

There's a lot of corruption amongst music journalists. We have to deal with issues of freebies in our training course. For example, free tickets are problematic. It's difficult, because very few critics could survive if they had to pay for everything themselves – I certainly couldn't. But we don't interrogate it enough. In the US, the paper buys tickets for critics and all free samples have to be declared and returned. Here, where we are expected to rely on freebies, it's probably okay if the same privileges are given to all journalists, but almost certainly opens the door to corruption where it's a personal favour. The media should be analysing the relationship between sponsors and arts, but they get freebies, so they don't. (Ansell, 2005. Int.)

Criticism has always been a form of publicity, either good or bad. However, in the wake of the distorted relationship between marketing and arts journalism, the power to persuade an audience reaction is less in the critics hands than in the publicists' or, more compromisingly, in the 'critic-as-publicist'. Grappling with the same issue in the United States, the editor-in-chief of the *Los Angeles Magazine*, Kit Rachlis, put it succinctly:

One of the principal reasons, particularly in the popular arts, is that you are grappling with – whether you are talking about movies, or pop music, or TV – among the most sophisticated marketers in the entire world, for whom critics and arts journalists and feature writers are simply the extension of their marketing arms. That's how they

view you. The whole point of movie studios (and I live in Los Angeles, so I am extremely cynical about this) is to marginalize and corrupt all of you. (NAJP, 2002)

Media production processes that value profit over content conspire against the critic's essential role. The blurring of the boundaries between disciplines of arts journalism mean that the specialization required of the critic is not properly appreciated in the newsroom. Anyone, in the end, can be a critic.²⁷

One of the signs for me is where you can have a competition, and someone who wins it can become a movie reviewer. Then you're not looking at reviewing as a specialized job - a difficult job that requires a specific education or background to do - you're looking at someone who can reflect audience reactions; which is fine, if you want that. These days test audiences are used a lot, and it's like using a member of the test audience as a reviewer as well, instead of some old grump who's ideas might be outmoded. It's the way product is marketed, and we'll see more and more of that. A critical meaning in this set-up is really redundant. (Pretorius, 2005. Int.)

They take someone out of technician, and now this person must pronounce. Why must that be an opinion piece? I would speak to the musician and say: "What are you trying to do?" I know from the musicians, they hate that kind of stuff, particularly if the person isn't qualified to understand the medium. (Sikwebu, 2005. Int.)

10.2 Reporting the arts

Generally the quality of coverage of the arts in South Africa is really not very good at all. The very basics are done...[but] there is very little in-depth analysis of what is going on in the country, very little investigative journalism. (van Graan, 2005. Int.)

Informants felt that the arts under-reported. In itself, the sector has a low newsworthiness in the newsroom; despite that even scratching the surface could yield a range of interesting, relevant and credible stories:

²⁷ Interestingly, while Rachlis goes on to say that critics have marginalised themselves from the mainstream by developing a "private language", what she suggests about the state of criticism in the United States is, in effect, an inversion of what many informants feel is happening in South Africa right now: "I'd like to change the conversation a bit and suggest that there is a fundamental contradiction occurring with arts criticism in this country right now, which is that the quality of criticism is considerably higher than it was 25 to 30 years ago. If you walked into any newsroom 25 to 30 years ago, the reigning ethos was that anybody could be an art critic. So it was often the dumping ground for the drunks and the incompetents. It was the gulag of the newspaper world. In the hierarchy of newspapers, it ranked somewhere near the women's pages. Investigative and political reporters were on top, sports reporters were right behind, but cultural writing was, for the most part, at the lowest point of the hierarchy. If you wanted to rise at a newspaper, being a cultural reporter was not the place to be." (NAJP, 2002)

Two years ago I was the only journalist at the NAC [National Arts Council] hearings, which was terrible. Then I got space in Tonight. But we need to do more of that stuff. Sometimes the main body will take it, but all newspapers need to report it, because it's taxpayers' money. I could do that full-time, but we need to chase that stuff up. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

Reporting on the arts does not need to be confined to issues of governance, corruption or accountability; it can simply be a case of letting the public know what is going on:

When I say 'arts coverage', I'm not talking about Isidingo. I'm talking about looking at South African issues in the arts, looking at South African arts across the spectrum, especially in communities that were previously disadvantaged, especially looking at policy. If you look at the Arts and Culture White Paper, you will be blown away by so many innovate, wonderful things we're doing about arts in this country, but you'll never see those things reflected in the media. (Journ., 2005. Int.)

While arts reporting has the potential to be a catalyst to a dialogue that is "essential in national cultural terms" (Accone 2005. Int.), it provides a context in which artistic production can be understood:

Tonight had a clear delineation between arts reporting and arts reviewing, but it was clear to a reader when someone was reviewing and reporting. Now reporting happens far less. People don't have a broader context to place a review in. It's important to have both those things. (Ibid.)

Instead, these possibilities are sacrificed for a "reporting about trivia" (Ibid.) that is seen to barely conform to ordinary standards of reporting:

Doesn't it go against the rules of journalism? Most of these are opinion pieces. There is a role for arts reporting, but people don't think there is a role for that. They think the arts are above all the other rules. (Sikwebu, 2005. Int.)

I consider myself a storyteller first. I apply the same rules of telling any story to any beat I cover, whether it's politics, general news, arts, whatever. You need to have the same principles. Tell this thing with all the seriousness it deserves. (Journ., 2005. Int.)

A hard news approach to the arts, where reporting on the arts conforms to the rigours of straightforward journalism, would mitigate the negative impact poor reporting has on artists:

I just think this is another big stone on the head or neck of the artist. It's unfair, given the economic difficulties, to now have a second punishment. The jazz musicians hate it. There's first the problem of finding a recording contract; if a jazz musician sells 3000 CDs you're doing okay. Now you've had an opportunity, you knock on doors, say, "I have this project", sign a contract, and have a 22-year old that says: "Ah, that's a load of..." (Sikwebu, 2005. Int.)

Instead of knocking on doors themselves, journalists are "not proactive enough" (Constant, 2005. Int.):

Arts and culture journalists, both black and white, work from their offices. I know this because I see it. They're being fed by institutions, which have marketing infrastructure, and there's not enough discovery. There's not enough seeing what's new. (Madondo, 2005. Int.)

10.3 The role of the publicist

Although the art of publicity is outside the scope of this research, it is worth mentioning that the publicist plays a key role in shaping how the arts are communicated to the public, and what, in the end, makes the news. For instance, as much as 60% of the Tonight's editorial is promotional material (Walker, 2005. Int.) - although it is unclear how much of this was re-written or reshaped before publication.

What is published is only a fraction of the promotional material an editor receives on a daily basis, which one informant estimated was in the region of 150 e-mails a day. Artslink.co.za alone sends out, on average, 12 media releases each day.

Within this clutter of information, only the savvy publicist is going to be heard. This means that nurturing a good relationship with editors is crucial:

Servicing the press is very important, according to their needs and according to what they want. Some of them are not as fussy as others, and sometimes you have to woo them. But if you do go out of your way to make their job easier, your job is easier. I am only as good as my media contacts. If I don't have media contacts I don't have clients. (Publicist, 2005. Int.)

Joy Sapieka, who has worked as a publicist for 25 years, both locally and abroad, suggests that there is a different kind of power relationship between the publicist and the arts editor in South Africa, compared to the kind that exists in the United Kingdom or the United States, where "people understand that no-one holds all the cards":

There are a lot more newspapers and a lot more competition, more of a competitive spirit. In England, if you had a good name and said 'no' to an editor, that would be a disaster. (Sapieka, 2005. Int.)

Despite the high reliance on publicity material to make up arts or entertainment content, the media does, at times, have an uncomfortable relationship with publicists:

Every week there's 20-30 e-mails from PR companies looking for free airtime. They get paid for what they achieve, and for us that's a bit of a problem. Some of the stuff we can use, but you never know if you're fulfilling some financial obligation the PR company has to the client. So you've got to be careful with that. (Johnson, 2005. Int.)

That arts coverage (such as previews) can be considered publicity, is sometimes used to justify excluding arts coverage from the news:

The response I get consistently is: "Are you not advertising?". Then I ask: "When you do a preview of the Super 8 SA A", I never hear that question being asked, but when I want to do a preview of an event that happens to be Arts Alive, I'm asked: "are you not advertising?" Of course I'm advertising! I'm telling South Africans this is what is happening. In most news you advertise some event by previewing it; you're saying: "If anyone out there is interested in an event like this, then go". But when it comes to the arts, there's a consistent response: 'but that's advertising...' (Journ., 2005. Int.)²⁸

At the same time, good relationships with editors can lead to a bias in what is covered.²⁹ Whether this is a good or bad thing, depends on what you want out of arts content: "The publicist is not responsible for the product, but for making sure the product is being seen." (Sapieka, 2005. Int.)

10.3.1 The skills levels of publicists

Several informants blamed the poor state of arts coverage in South Africa on unskilled or disinterested publicists – and even on the fact that some artists didn't feel the need to employ publicists:

The primary limitation to more media coverage of artists/artistic events is that artists in South Africa ARE NOT MEDIA SAVVY. There seems to be little or no understanding of what "publicity" means, about how to sell yourself, about the importance of an

²⁸ One informant pointed out that simply allowing arts previews in broadcasting does not necessarily amount to good arts journalism. Many sports previews balance critical content with publicity. In contrast, arts previews, when they do occur, most often are devoid of any critical content, and are simply enthusiastic announcements that an event is going to take place. "The situation is compounded when the paper or TV or radio station is a media sponsor of the [event]. Then the reporter is obliged to sell the event because his bosses are invested in it. But that is not journalism." (Ansell, 2005. Int.)

²⁹ In one instance, four out of five interviews aired on an SABC arts slot were organised by the same publicist.

agent/manager, about publicity pictures, press releases or how to communicate with the press/media. (Smith, 2005. e-Int.)

What also changed for me over the years is the quality of the publicists. When I started, you had publicists who had a passion for films and books. They knew what was happening. Nowadays [when it gets to serious art] some publicists say: 'You might think it's a big name, but how do I sell this?'. Some publicists in film have a limited history or insight into film as a culture but are good at promoting it as a product, which is a different thing. You can discuss, say, the latest event; for example, *Star Wars*, which is going to sell itself, a product de luxe. But if you want to discuss anything further than that, it doesn't always work. (Pretorius, 2005. Int.)

Many of the problems are practical ones, such as the quality of media releases, understanding the technological limitations in a newsroom³⁰ or appreciating the time pressures under which journalists work:

I spend an inordinate amount of my time CHASING artists and their publicists to get good, high quality pictures to use with stories...It is not uncommon to receive images so ghastly, so hideous, so unusable that they immediately put you off that artist forever. I should NOT have to chase. (Smith, 2005. e-Int.)

Faxes are a problem. I don't have time to type them out, so I don't use them. Launches take time, and are problematic. We're short staffed, under-equipped. I still then have to type out press info. from the [media] packet. *Maybe* I will send a photographer. (De Klerk, J. 2005. Int.)

Media releases, in particular, are frequently badly written. For instance, Artslink.co.za, which effectively filters publicity material that finally reaches the news desk, says even paid publicists don't know the basics:

What we check for is the five Ws and the H. [Even] professional publicists aren't adhering to that style. They don't tell you where it is, when it is... (De Klerk, TJ. 2005. Int)

Journalists are cynical beyond your wildest imagination. They are NOT INTERESTED in your hype, they want FACTS: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, HOW, WHY, DATES, PLACES. Keep it to ONE PAGE, as any more automatically goes into the bin. (Smith, 2005. e-Int.)

Many publicists also do not have a keen sense of different media markets or how the media works:

³⁰ "My e-mail is slow, the bandwidth is slow. I have a 5 meg mailbox." (De Klerk, J. 2005. Int), or: "I don't need a 2.5 meg e-mail to tell me there's a flea market this Friday." (De Klerk, TJ. 2005. Int.)

They don't understand how the media works, how many artists read the newspaper, how many subscribe. They don't actually read the publication they expect to appear in...don't find out what is happening in newsroom – who the editors are, what the publications are and what their target markets are. (De Klerk, T.J. 2005. Int.)

Because Pulse goes to print TWO WEEKS before the newspaper comes out, we often can't cover breaking arts stories...Our print deadlines means that we are TOTALLY DEPENDENT on publicists being ahead of themselves and able to give us correct info long before events/shows/exhibitions, etc. (Smith, 2005. e-Int.)

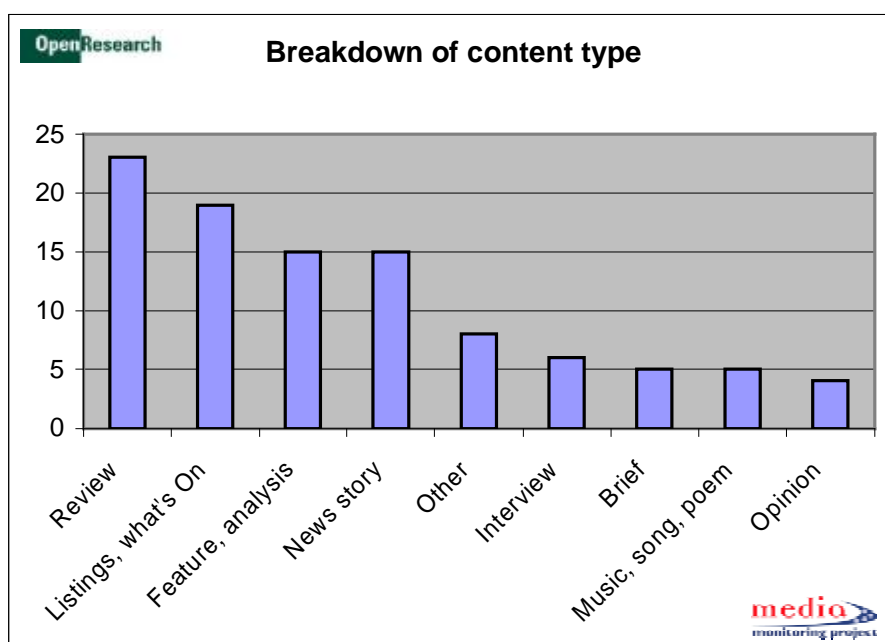
In contrast, successful publicists say the key is understanding these technical details. Good publicists need to be energetic, passionate and creative:

The art of being a good publicist is how you can sell something in so many ways. The press isn't the only way you promote the arts. It has to be a whole strategy. It's not just about picking up the phone and saying: "We've have an interesting exhibition, do you want write about it?" (Sapieka, 2005. Int.)

Everybody wants bums on seats. Maybe sports people won't go to the arts. We have to push the boundaries, and we have to come out of the envelope that arts is high and mighty. Someone who watches sport, I want to say: "That rugby player you like, he's also an opera singer. Why don't you watch him?" (Publicist, 2005. Int.)

10.4 Criticism versus promotional content

Graph 15



Graph 15 gives a breakdown of the type of content items monitored. As it suggests, reviews are the most common type of arts editorial (making up 23% of the total editorial count), followed by listings (19%), features (15%), and news stories (15%). Briefs represent 5% of the total content count, and opinion pieces³¹ or commentaries on the arts only 2% of the total count.

However, a review does not necessarily indicate that it can be considered criticism – it may, for instance, function more as publicity than a critical assessment of a production. The results suggest that most media coverage of the arts simply reflects what is going on in the arts, rather than offering some sort of journalistic intervention through an interpretation of the arts.

Nearly 20% of the arts content items monitored can be considered promotional. In contrast, 12% expressed some form of criticism, and 12% offered an analysis in support of a point of view.³² This breakdown is shown in the table below:

Table 1

Promotional	Summary	Critical	Descriptive	Analysis
17%	32%	12%	28%	12%

³¹ Opinion pieces differ from reviews in the way that an item on ‘the state of dance in South Africa’ is different to a review of Ivan Teme’s *Within*. Similarly, a feature on an artist is different to a news story announcing that the Violent Femmes or Westlife are about to tour South Africa.

³² The definition of what counts as a critical content is broad. If an item merely suggested an endorsement of a film or show (as in ‘a must see’) it was counted as offering a critical perspective. Items that provided analysis, however, needed to provide reasons or justify those critical perspectives. At the most only 24% of the content offers some sort of critical or analytical intervention. However, there is much overlap between critical and analytical content and the total can, in reality, be taken to be between 15-20%. The percentage totals for Table 1 do not add up to 100% because an item could offer a summary and be critical at the same time.

11. When is arts coverage news?

News and sports is a component in every one of the bulletins, but the same doesn't apply to the arts. There needs to be arts on every bulletin, like you have sports. A bit of sports, arts and economics and all the news you want. If you don't consciously make the effort, it's not going to happen. (Journ., 2005. Int.)

Unlike sports and business news, the arts are seldom reported as news items in radio and television news broadcasts. SABC television, for instance, has news, sports, economics and politics desk, but no arts desk, despite attempts to establish one (Journ, 2005. Int.). e-tv's *e-Arts*, tagged onto the station's main news bulletin of the day, was, for a short time, a notable exception. However, this level of exposure and prominence for the arts was relatively short-lived, and has been replaced by a comparatively diluted sense of the newsworthiness of the arts:

It would have to have a broad appeal to South Africans and be an issue which most South Africans are interested in or have some knowledge about. e-tv is a broad spectrum channel so we avoid covering news that would appeal only to certain market niches. (Keene-Young, 2005. Int.)

Arts news does at times make the news pages in the press. However, this relationship tends to be unpredictable. While arts news that conforms to straightforward news values, such as the death or murder of a prominent artist, is reported, a random sampling of arts content published in news pages suggests that, in the main, the arts are newsworthy for reasons other than the value of artistic production itself – they are made newsworthy by association. For example, a young, promising black cartoonist will be featured, not because the art of cartooning has any news value, but because the artist is young, black, good and engages in political satire.³³

Arts content that makes it into the news pages also tends to cluster similar content around it – usually picked from the wires. For example, a story about Picasso is accompanied by one on Cezanne and Pissarro (The Star, June 29, 2005). There are exceptions to this. *Beeld*, for example, regularly runs arts and entertainment coverage in the main body of the newspaper. This ranges from “anything that happens in 7de Laan” (Schoombie, 2005. Int.), coverage of *Beeld*-sponsored

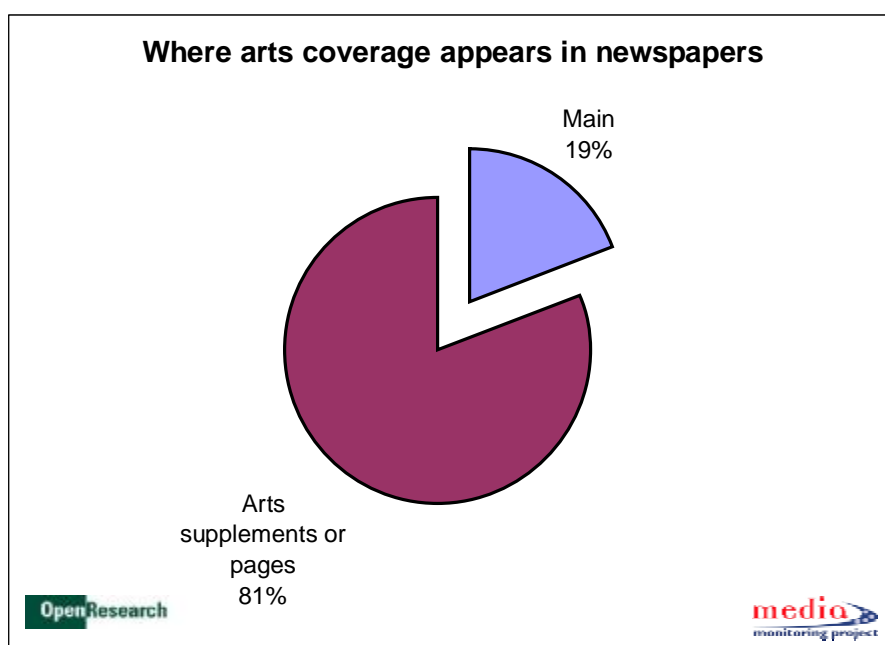
³³ Other examples are: when there is a cause supported by artists (e.g. the Live8 event, which received prominent coverage); when there is a controversy surrounding a powerful or important person, such as the scandal around the Nelson Mandela paintings; when an issue of human interest involves an historically prominent artist (e.g. a story about Picasso's 'muse', Genevieve LaPorte); when art is created by people who are sick, terminally ill or disabled; when art becomes an oddity, or the “bearded lady” syndrome (e.g. the price fetched for paintings by primates); when there is controversy (e.g. what happened to Brenda Fassie's millions?); when there is celebrity scandal or gossip.

festivals, such as Aardklop³⁴ and entertainment shows in which Naspers³⁵ has an interest, such as M-Net's Idols,³⁶ to coverage of Afrikaans literature.³⁷ According to Plus editor Schalk Schoombie,³⁸ the news pages will deal with cultural "debates around these, with wider issues" although "not necessarily arts coverage in itself." (Ibid.) Nevertheless, it is this fluid relationship between the arts, the cultural issues they raise and news coverage that is seldom felt in the daily English-language press.

Space constraints in the *Mail & Guardian's* Friday have also pushed certain kinds of arts coverage into the news and opinion pages. While the newspaper's editor supports this arrangement, the arts coverage needs to be the kinds of stories that "sit well in news or op-ed".³⁹ (Krouse, 2005. Int.)

As graph 16 suggests, 19% of the arts content monitored in the print media occurred outside of the supplements or pages where arts content is typically found.

Graph 16



³⁴ A separate jacket is produced by the main paper's journalists, for local distribution in Potchefstroom during the festival.

³⁵ *Beeld's* owner.

³⁶ Similarly, the *Sunday Times* recently ran a three-part feature on the state of the arts in South Africa – the result, however, of its own Bessie Head Fellowship.

³⁷ This is an historical reflection of the importance of the Afrikaans writer in Afrikaans culture. For instance, Afrikaans theatre does not receive the same attention in the news pages. (Schoombie, 2005. Int)

³⁸ Since conducting this research, Schoombie has left *Beeld*.

³⁹ What exactly 'sits well' is being tested in an interesting and refreshing way. Recently the newspaper ran what was effectively a straightforward arts story as a news item (coverage of Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's play *Relativity: Township stories*, a mini-feature, which included an interview with the playwright) (*Mail & Guardian*, 14 – 20/10/2005).

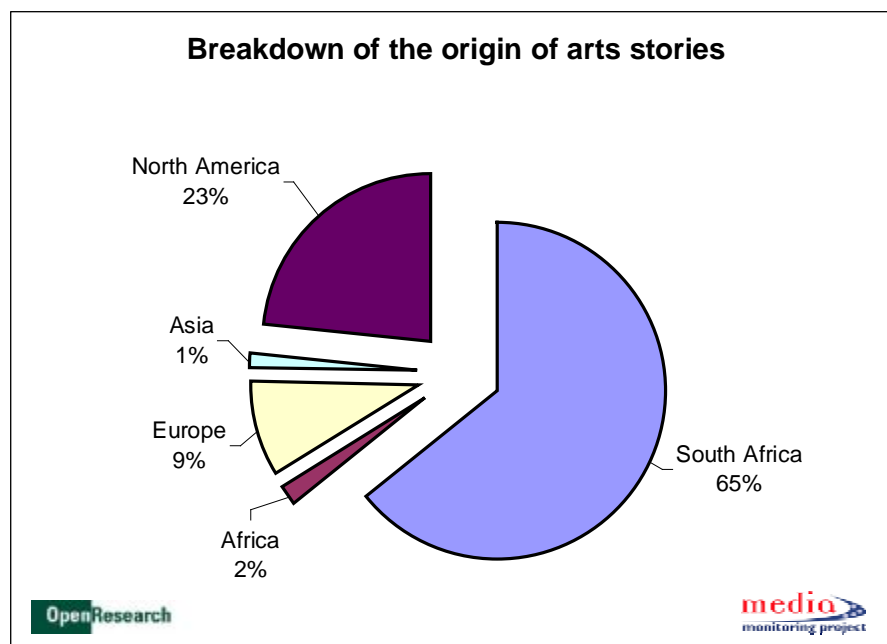
12. Local versus foreign content

While it is felt that there is an historical tendency in the media to favour the international arts over local arts,⁴⁰ some informants said it was important to properly represent international developments in the arts: “covering the arts internationally is essential, because ideas are international.” (Greig, 2005. Int.) However, the extent to which the international arts are covered with any seriousness in the mainstream media is debatable. Typically, coverage suffers the same maladies that affect local coverage, with a default to entertainment, publicity or gossip content.

At the same time, perceptions of audience interests often mean that the local arts are neglected in favour of light, Hollywood-style entertainment and celebrity gossip content. The pay-off line for the Showbiz Report’s latest billboard campaign, “Hollywood at home”, is a clear example of this. Ironically, the Showbiz Report does offer some interesting publicity for local acts, such as new bands, which are not covered elsewhere in the media. However, this is not promoted or captured in its marketed identity.

The graph below gives the percentage breakdown of the origin of the artistic production, event or personality covered.

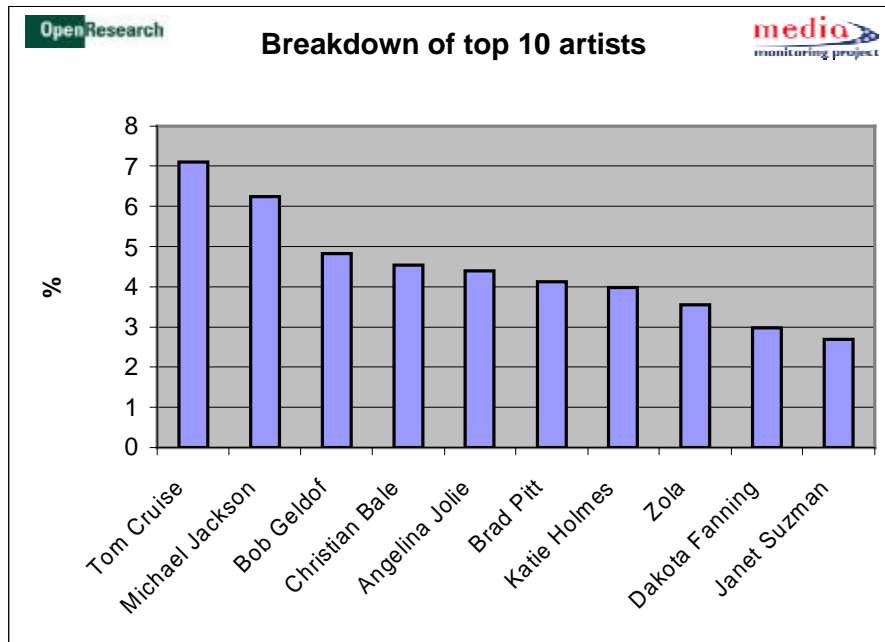
Graph 17



As can be seen, the majority of the artistic productions, events or personalities covered in the media are South African. Nearly 25% are from North America (with the majority being from the United States) and nearly 10% are European. The arts in the rest of the countries in Africa are poorly represented, as are the arts from Asia.

⁴⁰ For example, this is one of the reasons behind the local content quotas for broadcasters.

Graph 18



Graph 18 shows that four of the top five artists covered by content count are Hollywood stars. Kwaito star, Zola, was the most frequently covered local artist. The monitoring period covered the release of movies like *Mr and Mrs Smith*, *Batman Begin*, and *War of the Worlds*, which explains the prominence of stars like Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Tom Cruise, Dakota Fanning, Christian Bale, and Katie Holmes. The budding relationships between Cruise and Holmes and Jolie and Pitt were also high on the news agenda during the period. Bob Geldof received coverage for his Live8 concerts, which were held around the world to raise funds for Africa, while the Michael Jackson child abuse trial ensured that the musician's name was prominent in many media. Notably, most of the top ten artists were film stars, with the exception of Geldof, Zola, and theatre veteran, Janet Suzman.

13. Practical challenges in the newsroom

13.1 Staffing

The staffing quotas to produce arts and entertainment supplements in the print media vary – at times dramatically. *Beeld's Plus* is compiled by 12 staff members, including administrative staff, and a motley mix of contract, part-time, and full-time staff. Seven journalists (including the travel and lifestyle editors, and the Plus editor himself) produce the content for the supplement.⁴¹ In addition, a part-time employee works on television listings. Plus also employs a sub-editor, two proofreaders and a layout artist, and shares a secretary with the newspaper's photographers. This staff complement excludes journalists who might write for the book pages, which is part of the main newspaper.

The Star's Tonight (in Johannesburg), is put together by 10 staff members, including four sub-editors. However, only three journalists are responsible for producing the content, a situation which is felt to be sufficient for the supplement's needs. Like *Beeld*, *Tonight's* books page is edited separately, although it appears in the supplement.⁴²

Tonight's regional bureaus – which produce content for the provincial editions – have fewer staff members. According to *Tonight's* editor, Janine Walker, this means that the regional bureaus are more dependent on content produced in Johannesburg. The size of the regional editions also varies. *Cape Argus Tonight* is "sometimes only four pages" (Walker, 2005. Int.), compared to the 12 - 20 pages of *The Star's* supplement.⁴³

The staff complements at the weekly papers tend to be fewer, and, in some instances, are a case of too many chiefs and not enough Indians. *Mail & Guardian's* Friday is produced by three journalists, all of them editors: a books editor, an arts editor and a listings editor. The listings editor used to draw on contributions from freelance listings scouts, but this, together with the listings offered by the newspaper, has been scaled back significantly.

The *Sunday Independent's* Culture pages are put together by an editor, who then works with a chief sub-editor and generalist editors who assist with layout and who are "the historical memory" of the paper (Greig, 2005. Int.). Similarly, the paper's books page has its own editor.

The arts pages in *Sunday Times's* Metro are produced by a section editor, who is responsible for an average of 8-10 pages, and who relies on a freelancer to produce

⁴¹ Key content categories are classical music, opera, ballet, drama, pop, physical theatre, radio, travel, and lifestyle.

⁴² Robert Greig, the arts editor at the *Sunday Independent*, compares this to the situation at the *Tonight* in the late seventies: eight journalists produced the content, each with specialised fields, which included cinema, theatre, dance, classical music and the fine arts. (Greig, 2005, Int.)

⁴³ Janine Walker has since left *Tonight*. Independent News and Media has also centralised its content production and marketed identity for the group's entertainment supplements.

arts reviews and listings. The remaining content is produced by journalists or sub-editors from the main newspaper on the section editor's request.

The situation is slightly different for broadcast media. For instance, an hour-long news-based programme such as the SABC 3's *The World Today* requires three journalists to produce the content for the show, and around 16 people to present it, including the presenters and the studio crew. (Lewington, 2005. Int.).

In general, the smaller the staff complement of journalists, the less in-house specialisation a newspaper has to draw on in its own ranks.⁴⁴ With the pressure of meeting daily deadlines, staff shortages mean that arts journalists frequently aren't able to provide the kind of coverage they would ideally like. Already many arts journalists say they work long and irregular hours, something that is often misunderstood by other journalists in the newsroom (Sichel, 2005. Int.). Practical limitations make it difficult enough to cover the basics, let alone hard news arts stories:

Also in terms of these theatres have financial scandals. It's a bit unfair to say arts journalists should do it, because there are so few of us, and are so many pressures to do other stuff. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

13.2 Budgets

Arts editors' budgets (for instance, for commissioning freelancers or for travel) also vary. Both *Metro* and *Tonight* describe their budgets as "comfortable" (Walker, 2005. Int.; Rangongo, 2005. Int.), and appear to have some leeway with spending. *Tonight*, for example, can go 10-15% over budget if necessary. However, a number of editors said their budgets limited what they could cover in the arts – with some budgets even shrinking.⁴⁵

In some instances, editors were not aware what their budgets were, and engaged impressionistically with the finance department on commissioning and other spending. This was described by one interviewee as an "unintentional form of control", reducing the editor to a "functionary". As in the case of the *Sunday Independent's* Culture pages and *Tonight*, a 'comfortable' budget and a limited budget for arts coverage can be found in the same newspaper group.

In general, budgetary allocations for the arts appeared directly linked to the financial success of a particular publication, broadcaster or programme. For instance, *The Sunday Independent* was described as "loss-making" with little advertising revenue or resources, many of which are now shared with the *Saturday Star*. *The Star*, by contrast, makes a profit (Greig, 2005. Int.).

⁴⁴ Newspapers publishing as part of a media group – for example, *Beeld* and *Die Burger* or *The Star* and the *Sunday Independent* – often share original copy, or rely on a sister newspaper to cover an event. This potentially increases their ability to cover the arts more broadly.

⁴⁵ For example the *Mail & Guardian* is going through a belt-tightening phase. (Krouse, 2005. Int.)

However, profitability does not necessarily mean that there is a commitment to improving arts coverage. There is, for instance, little commitment from media houses to train arts journalists⁴⁶ (Memela, 2005. Int.; Ansell, 2005. Int.), to offer them better salaries, or to increase incentives for freelancers.

13.2.1 Freelancers

We do use stringers; but we have limited budget, so we can't do it as much as would like to. (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)

Informants suggested that good arts content relies on a diversity of voices and opinions. At the same time, the breadth of disciplines included in what we define as "the arts", means that the need for specialization to produce good content is inevitable. While in-house staff shortages mean that the range and quality of arts coverage is likely to be limited, shrinking budgets mean that in many instances this cannot be remedied by commissioning freelancers.

Rates paid to freelancers are low, and range from R250 for a review of any length, to R1 or R1.50 per word. Sometimes a kill-fee of 50% is offered for copy not used. Many informants said these fees were not market-related. However, the commonality of the rates seemed to dictate a market standard that had not been "revised for 3-4 years" (Greig, 2005. Int.)

The situation for freelance reviewers is dire. If you're starting a magazine or newspaper it is very expensive, so you would invest in permanent staff, and use freelancers to give variety to the papers, which is understandable. But when there are budget cuts the first people always to go are the freelancers. If you're a freelancer you work with that kind of reality; so if you work as a freelancer in this kind of business, you always have to have a standby. (Pretorius, 2005. Int.)

That freelancers cannot survive on the poor rates paid by most newspapers, potentially further weakens the pool of experienced critics and reviewers from which arts editors can draw.⁴⁷ Instead, freelancers do what they do because they "just like doing it" (Ibid.), with some even contributing to publications for free.

⁴⁶ Training opportunities that involved engaging with the Department of Arts and Culture have not been taken up by the media. In February 2003, a Reporting Arts and Culture course, organised by the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism, had to be cancelled after only six South African publications applied. According to the course coordinator, Gwen Ansell, "two more editors grudgingly said the 'might send someone if you can cover all this stuff in just a couple of days'." (Ansell, 2003). Since 2003, Ansell has been running a specialist music journalism workshop as part of the Cape Town International Jazz Festival with, she says, considerable interest from journalists who recognize their skills need polishing.

⁴⁷ The one exception is book reviewers. Freelance book reviewers appear to be in abundance, and readily commissioned by books editors, albeit at low rates. However, few of them are arguably 'book reviewers' by profession, and more frequently are academics or experts in a particular field, or writers themselves.

13.2.2 Wire copy

Limited budgets are likely to increase the print media's reliance on news feeds for content fillers. The dependency on wire services for content at some newspapers ranged from anything between 20-40% of the total editorial.

Most larger media houses are subscribed to celebrity gossip and entertainment wires services, such as BANG, ShowBiz, Entertainment News, or the Hollywood Reporter, and also have access to credible arts content through deals with the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post* or the *Independent* in London. Stand-alone newspapers, such as the *Mail & Guardian*, have fewer options. It only has access to international content from the *Guardian* in the United Kingdom:

More and more, we are finding a situation where small agencies are setting themselves up [but some of them] seem to be expensive, and very mainstream entertainment-orientated, so we don't use them.
(Krouse, 2005. Int.)

Most wire services offer international content (mostly content from the United States and Europe), rather than access to stories about the arts in South Africa. While the South African Press Association (SAPA) provides a feed for local and international content to most newspapers, it does not cover local arts on a regular basis.⁴⁸

Artslink.co.za, which describes itself as an arts and entertainment wire service, provides a steady flow of arts and entertainment media releases to the newsroom. However, its attempt to set up a pay-if-you-publish content feed⁴⁹ was not successful. Accounts of why this was the case differ, and include limited budgets to pay for the content, limited space in newspapers, the need for newspapers to have a unique identity with original, rather than shared, copy, and the idea that the concept was before its time. (Accone, 2005. Int.; De Klerk, T.J. 2005. Int.)

13.3 Space constraints

Bear in mind that Pulse is ONLY 36 pages ... so we don't have oodles of space. (Smith, 2005. Int.)

The potential space for arts content in print supplements depends on the amount of advertising sold. While the space available for arts content in most arts pages (as opposed to supplements) is fixed,⁵⁰ the page count for some entertainment supplements can range from anything between 8-24 (or more) pages for a tabloid

⁴⁸ According to SAPA, it does receive arts and entertainment media releases, but will only cover a story if there is an interesting or newsworthy angle. Although it has an "Arts and entertainment" category for its news feed, little of its content output is arts and entertainment news (an estimate of less than 2% was given).

⁴⁹ Called *ArtsWire*, and produced by, amongst others, a number of experienced journalists who had left *The Star* Tonight.

⁵⁰ For instance, the *Sunday Independent* has set aside three pages (including the books page) for arts content. Similarly, with broadcast, in particular television, a set number of minutes are allocated for content (e.g. 20 minutes of content for half-an-hour broadcast time).

supplement and anything between 36 - 61 (or more) pages for a magazine insert. Typically, for dailies, the page count swells towards the end of the week, following an increase in interest from advertisers as the weekend approaches.

However, 40 - 60% of this potential space for editorial is taken up by advertising. In some instances, this excludes pages set aside for standardized content such as crosswords, horoscopes, comic strips or listings. According to Schoombie, if a 12 page supplement is produced, just over seven of these pages will be adverts. However, of the remaining pages, only two-and-a-half will be used for the "more serious stuff" (Schoombie, 2005. Int.).

Informants pointed out that this is substantially different to the amount of space given to arts coverage in the past. For instance, "20 years ago" Tonight was often a 30-page supplement (Walker, 2005. Int.), offering what one veteran arts journalist called "masses of space" for arts content (Sichel, 2005. Int.). The situation is said to have been similar at *Rapport*:

Our arts editor had five arts pages and a brief to cover arts and culture in depth and in a popular way. We had Brink writing on books - his reviews later came out as a book. We had news about what was happening, a theatre page, classical, pop music page, a variety of freelancers to give in-depth coverage too. Five full content pages. (Pretorius, 2005. Int.)

As recently as 2000, Tonight still had at least one "ad-free" page a day that was dedicated to serious arts content, such as dance, theatre or film, that the editor could "feel comfortable with." Now that guaranteed space is "almost ads only". (Accone, 2005. Int.).

One sub-editor offered an interesting account of producing a weekly entertainment supplement, graphically demonstrating that even if more and better arts content were available, it's unlikely that there would be the space for even the most committed arts editor to include it:

It is a conversation with the ad department. At the begging of the week, they'll say: 'We have a full page ad, and a half page ad.' You have a little bit of space to say: 'Please put it on page three, not page five.' You have some space to say where it will go, not negotiate it out. The sub will start to lay out the pages, then ads are added, and you have to start throwing out things...It's so formularised there is very little flexibility. Formularised in the sense that, for one, there is very little space. In that space available, which is tight, you get an ad and half your copy goes. Each week we are expected to include the CDs, the video and the celebs, something on television and something on film. Once you put those in, you don't have any space left. It's pre-decided. (De Klerk, J. 2005. Int.)

13.4 Green journalists

There is a serious dearth of journalistic talent that is going to help it elevate the arts. Journalists are young, inexperienced, and ill trained. (Memela, 2005. Int.)

While some newsrooms have experienced journalists covering specific beats (e.g. dance, theatre, classical music or film), informants spoke of a skills shortage in the newsroom and a lack of up-and-coming journalistic talent:

People are quick to criticism the SABC, but a lot of it is unfair. We don't have the talent. We just don't have the journalists with the skills and ability to cover television. (Journ. 2005. Int.)⁵¹

Within the traditionally black market, we have focused on entertainment, what they call 'popular culture', in such a way that [the arts are covered] glibly, artificially, without depth. But it is not their intention to, so you can't blame them. They don't have qualified, experience, insightful journalists, who are dedicated to reporting, analysing and critiquing arts and culture in an insightful way. (Madondo, 2005. Int.)

There are a lot of journalists who are coming in who are not trained. When you go for radio interviews, TV interviews, they haven't done their homework. They just read the questions. They haven't read the press release. They haven't done any research on the person they're interviewing – to know what CD they've launched or show they've just come out of. And that upsets the artists. Then the artists don't want to be interviewed. (Publicist, 2005. Int.)

Green journalism "mis-translates" the arts for the public:

I read a review of Zim Ngqawana's album, and it was clear to me that the journalist had not spoken to him, which annoyed me. In this album that he had, he took the national anthem, and in the opening of this tune he uses Nkosi Sikelele' and then he goes off on a tangent. When I asked him why he did this, he said to me that we have been brought up with choral music, church hymns and all of that, and that some of these are part of the colonial strategy to lull the people. So he starts with Nkosi Sikelele' and from that place goes into free jazz to break from this. And this was a way of making the point. When you listen to it knowing that or having heard that you've got a better appreciation. The arts journalist saw this as disrespectful of the anthem, and had no understanding of what was being done. For artists, life is very difficult. So for their work to be condemned by some 15-year-old sitting in a newsroom is the worst thing that can

⁵¹ A similar comment was made about the skills levels of the presenters of arts programming.

happen. I thought it was a level of arrogance on the part of the journalist. (Sikwebu, 2005. Int.)

At the same time, it is difficult for an arts desk to retain skilled writers:

There are very few skilled people left. Historically [black] people came through community projects and were interested in the arts. If they showed even a glimmer of talent, they were immediately snapped up and put into business and politics. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

For some, this amounts to a crisis for the future of arts journalism in South Africa:

Only so many people can write about classical music. I can't find stringers that can write good copy for ballet. Everybody wants to be a movie reviewer, but not everyone can pull it off, and write good copy. There are few arts journalists coming into the field. It takes time to nurture new arts journalists. (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)

13.5 Status of the arts journalist in the newsroom

Informants reported a divide in the newsroom between the (professional) treatment and attitude towards arts journalists and journalists working different beats:

I realized in the 80s, we were described as not being real journalists. [But] in the 70s and 80s and mid-90s, we were super-journalists. Sometimes we were going out into the war zones. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

There's definitely a divide between the rest of the paper and Plus. It's an island mentality. I don't think it is healthy. The perception is that other journalists look down on the arts. It's something that I've picked up here and there as well. I think they do treat us with respect, but there's maybe not that keen an interest in what Plus is doing, as with what is happening in Sake [Business] or the car supplement. I don't think it is a serious situation, but there is some kind of divide. My own perception is that arts journalism in South Africa is still looked down upon as a kind of an orphan. (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)

The demands placed on arts journalists are often misunderstood by colleagues:

The hours are pretty punishing. Some people still say: 'You're going home at 3pm?' – but you're going to a revue at night. (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

While most of the arts editors interviewed participate in weekly news briefings, the extent to which they are given the authority to decide on all arts content in a particular publication varies:

We do have to guard certain areas. It's not a sinister thing. In other words, we have to justify carrying certain kinds of things. But I think there is very much the idea that we are the people who have lived in the sector long enough to decide what is important. There are odd occasions when editor says: 'That's awful' or 'Not an interesting gig, let us take it off the page'. She's the editor, and I will do it. I'm aware there's a collective effort. I have faith in my editor. That's the good thing about this newspaper. I do have faith and take advice, because at the end of the day, she's the editor and she can take the rap. (Krouse, 2005. Int.)

However, there is often a dislocation between this expertise and arts content that may be published. For example, sometimes arts copy is run as hard news without consultation with the editor of the arts pages. During the coverage of the *Beeld*-sponsored Aardklop festival, the paper sends 'regular' journalists to cover the event, as well as the Plus journalists, with some tension developing around where copy should be run.

Similarly, at the SABC, it is reported that there is little or no communication between programming and news:

After Weekend Live there's Weekend Life, then Lifestyle then Curious Culture. There is so much duplication that it is affecting the product. There's no discussion between news and programming. (Journ, 2005. Int.)

The dislocation between arts reporting and what is news to the newspaper is sometimes striking: "They like it when we do it, but if we don't do it, maybe it'd be noticed." (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

Some arts journalists are paid less for their work:

It's very badly paid, compared to if I were a financial writer or political journalist, just in terms of spectrum and grading. (Ibid.)

Arts journalism is seen as a glass ceiling:

Because I do the arts, I'm not going to succeed professionally in the media. If you do politics, you're likely to be pushed upwards, but as somebody who has a passion for the arts, it's very unlikely. (Journ. 2005. Int.)

Only one exception to this was reported:

I was approached by the team to set up the *Sunday World*, and they specifically recruited me to come and help find and launch their arts supplement, *Hola*... But the significant development was that I was [later] appointed acting editor of the *Sunday World*, which was an

amazing development for an arts and culture journalists editor. It's unheard of, because that's likely perceived as frivolous. (Memela, 2005. Int.)

This, combined with shrinking space for the arts, means that arts journalism is infrequently seen as an attractive career for journalists: "There are very few skilled people left. Some have gone into government, some into the private sector." (Sichel, 2005. Int.). Work options are limited:

I taught arts journalism for two years. For the most part, journalists are prepared for everything but arts journalism. It's not taken that seriously. Most don't think of it as a career. Rugby you can really make a career of. You can always find another paper or publication you can go to and write about sports, while it might not be the same for the arts. (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)

13.6 The role of media management

It depends on the perceptions of editors and newspapers of 'what culture is'. Is it what you see on TV at night? (Sichel, 2005. Int.)

The seriousness with which the arts are covered often depends on how media management sees the arts. While the interviews suggested that these attitudes varied, and were not necessarily consistent with the perspective that the "arts don't sell", the attitude that 'money and art don't mix' was frequently reported – at its most brusque, in the commercial radio setting. As one arts journalists put it, whenever she proposed arts content, she would be asked: "Where's the punch-line?" (Constant, 2005. Int.)

Pressure on editors to provide light, entertainment content, or more lifestyle and less arts in the content mix, means that space to cover the arts needs to be defended:

There's been a growing pressure to get more lifestyle into Plus and less serious stuff. There is definitely resistance from arts journalists, who feel their terrain threatened. I've been trying to maintain that balance, to always look for things that are really pertinent in terms of lifestyle and combine that with serious arts. (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)

One informant suggested that limited space for arts coverage was "good for the wrong reasons", as it allows arts editors some leverage to negotiate the "assault on intellectual copy" by doing a "judo trick" (Greig, 2005. Int.).

Another simply put management's reluctance to cover the arts properly down to a lack of education. This "infects every area of [the paper]" and results in an "insufficiently nuanced view of culture, news, politics, and even sport" (Accone, 2005. Int.):

Editors are not very well educated, with one or two exceptions. In general they have minimal tertiary education or none at all. They have a really limited grasp; because of this there is an inherent knee-jerk anti-intellectualism. (Ibid.)

Sometimes the prejudices are more sinister: "There is an underlying assumption by editors that the arts are for 'moffies'". (Greig, 2005. Int.)

In contrast, some informants reported a sympathetic and supportive attitude towards the arts. While "the present editor [of the *Mail & Guardian*] has invited certain kinds of arts coverage into the main paper", issues of "Afro-centric" culture are part of the marketed and felt identity of a station like Kaya FM:

Kaya is on a cusp. We're a commercial station, but very strong on the community too. We have a thing about doing things right, and addressing issues correctly. In real commercial radio, you play the hits; you shut up and make your money. (Johnson, 2005. Int.)

Similarly, media management has encouraged the arts section in the *Sunday Times's* Metro:

The editor said: 'We don't want just any crap, we want the best.' Be it ordinary art or high art. It has to be the best. People have to say, I'm not just going to read the news. I want to know what's happening in the world of art. It has to be good. (Rangongo, 2005. Int.)

14. The role of the SABC

The SABC has a policy mandate to “enrich the cultural heritage of South Africa by providing support for traditional and contemporary artistic expression” (Broadcasting Act 10f, 1999). It is also obliged to be “responsive to audience needs and account on how to meet those needs” (Broadcasting Act 8e, 1999).

The public broadcaster does support the arts, broadly conceived. Its acting CEO, Solly Mokoetle, is on record saying: “Arts and culture are pivotal to what we do as an organisation and therefore it makes sense for us to ensure their ongoing development.” (*Tonight*, march 22, 2005). The broadcaster covers festivals, flights arts programming and the arts form part of the programming mix of a range of educational and entertainment programmes.⁵²

The SABC also sponsors a range of arts events, with music as a priority. These include the recent 46664 concert, in support of the Nelson Mandela Foundation’s HIV/AIDS intervention, and the Cape Town International Jazz Festival (covered by SAfm and Good Hope FM, amongst others). It also sponsors the Dv8 Film project, which supports young and up-coming filmmakers and the Design Indaba, which promotes and supports creativity in the design industry. (Ibid.)

Amongst its radio stations, SAfm and RSG are considered the two stations that regularly provide programming in support of the arts (MM, 2005. Int.). As suggested, regional stations cover the arts as far as they fit into their mandate to reflect the cultures of their target audiences.

Interactions with SABC senior management during the course of this study suggested there is a commitment – and even a personal interest⁵³ – in the arts. There is also a recognition that the public broadcaster needs to do more for the arts. The SABC is currently in the process of reassessing its content strategy, particularly in light of the new regional licenses that have been granted. The broadcaster maintains that it has an open door policy, and that the arts community is free to approach it with any suggestions or programming ideas. (MM, 2005. Int.)

While the Broadcasting Act provides some direction for the SABC, it is vague enough for the corporation not to be held directly accountable by the public on its arts programming. At the same time, little of the good will towards the arts evident in SABC management is on paper. It has no clear strategy that refines its obligations in the Broadcasting Act, or guides content decision-making around the arts.

The absence of a clearly outlined strategy means that the arts are vulnerable. Even as public broadcaster, arts coverage faces a similar fate to coverage in the commercial

⁵² For example: Curious Culture, which considered a range of arts; Top Billing has interviews with designers and artists; arts and culture is highlighted in SABC 2’s Sho’t Left; poetry provides the lens through which the local is encountered in SABC 1’s Street Journal; and choral music is featured in SABC1’s Ezodumi and Imizwilili. (*The Star*, *Tonight*, 22/03/2005). Educational programmes where the arts are presented include Takalani Sesame (MM, 2005. Int.).

⁵³ One of the informants interviewed is a classical musician.

media. The SABC says licence fees and grants from the government do not cover all the necessary programming costs and a “key challenge is when you knock at corporate doors, the mindset is not there.” (MM, 2005. Int.) The result is a preference for more “popular” arts, and the light lifestyle and entertainment mix that can be on-sold to advertisers.

However, the absence of a commercial imperative is unlikely to improve arts programming. The broadcaster feels that its mandate is to cater for as broad an audience as possible. It currently commands an audience share of 70%, which is at polar opposites to other public broadcasters, particularly in developed countries, which have “big mandates which do all the rights things” (Kantor, 2005. Int.).⁵⁴ The SABC says it is crucial to retain the lion’s share of the public’s attention, and to leverage this influence effectively in the context of a developing country:

Inevitably those commercial considerations do play a part, but the SABC is attempting to build a model of public broadcaster, which is watched and listened to by the majority of South Africans. [Even if] we were completely publicly funded, we would still want a 70% audience share, because there is just no purpose if you have a public broadcaster in a developing country and the majority of South Africans are choosing to rather watch e-tv or commercial channels...We still want to drive programming that draws audiences, so that we can actually justify our existence. If we’re broadcasting to a minority of people, then why not privatise us and let other people do it? What is the sense of delivering a mandate if no-one is actually watching? (Ibid.)

According to Lara Kantor, the broadcaster’s general manager of Policy and Regulatory Affairs, the arts, which are considered a niche interest, are not a primary concern at the broadcaster:

There are areas of pressure that the SABC feels, so perhaps the arts get lost, because they haven’t been among those. We’ve felt enormous pressure historically on the issue of local content generally – it translates into local drama. There has also been enormous pressure on African language programming. Sport is a kind of pressure... [The pressure] comes externally through stakeholders, etcetera, but also internally. Those are the areas where it’s been felt that the SABC is lacking, and that we need to sort out. (Ibid.)

In this context, the challenge lies in the extent to which the broadcaster’s channels “can be distinctive”, can provide quality programming that sometimes can be niche, and “do that all in an appealing way that would bring the bulk of the audiences along” (Ibid.):

⁵⁴ For instance, Canada’s CBC has an audience share of below 10%.

That trade off happens continually. So you see us broadcasting Bold and the Beautiful, to draw the really big audience, or Generations; but between those will be opportunities for documentaries, for some arts programming, for religious programming. I guess the question is the extent to which we could start to be a bit more adventurous with programming which isn't completely mainstream. (Ibid.)

Niche programming is introduced slowly to a mass audience. Interestingly, Curious Culture is a good example of this. Although partially a result of new licensing conditions set by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), in 2006 documentaries and "other factual programming" will be rescheduled for prime time. Curious Culture has been re-commissioned, and will be shifted to a 19h30 prime time slot on SABC 2:

Our strategy has been to grow an appetite outside of prime, to protect the programming, allow it to grow and find its feet and allow an audience to develop a taste for it; and then to move it into a prime slot...They're very happy with the amount of effort the producers [of Curious Culture] put into that, and they feel it's ready for a prime time slot. (Ibid.)

15. Conclusion

Much has been made of the media's dependency on advertisers to ensure financial profitability, and how this has impacted on editorial independence. This study suggests that the fate of arts coverage in the media is a good example of this impact.

Research can be contradictory. While many in the media maintain that audience ratings and readership surveys show a low interest in the arts amongst the general public, independent research has suggested that the public's interest in the arts is far more active than is often assumed. In 2001, Markinor⁵⁵ found:

Three in five people would like more of an opportunity to take part in artistic activities themselves. As much as 93% want their children to take part in plays, learn to play a musical instrument or read poetry. Four in five respondents would like more public funding to the arts, and three out of four believe more efforts should be made to make the arts accessible. (Grotan, quoting Friedman, Mail & Guardian, 2001)

Similarly, recent research commissioned by Business & Arts South Africa found that, from a sample of nearly 2000 adults surveyed across all race groups, 35 - 56% of the respondents wanted more arts and culture programming on television, and 20 - 48% wanted more coverage of the arts on radio. (BMI-Sport Info, 2004)

Despite its target market ("a majority of readers love rugby and do not read about ballet and classical music" (Schoombie, 2005. Int.)), Beeld has been able to sense a strong interest in arts coverage amongst its readers:

We've seen response to classical music concerts. Thys Odendaal [Plus's classical music critic] will tell you the concerts are filled to capacity, and they're keen to have publicity in Plus. By placing a small story about a concert, it will sell out in an hour or two on day of publication; so we do know of that impact. (Ibid.)

Arguably SABC 2's low audience ratings for the National Arts Festival or Aardklop may be due to a number of reasons, including how coverage was marketed on the station (and on sister stations), broadcast times, content flighted on competing channels at the time of broadcast, and how the festival was covered.

Media that have shown an adventurous spirit by, even if tentatively, venturing into the arts (such as the *Sunday Times's* Metro or SABC 3's World Today) report an enthusiastic and vocal response from readers and audiences. By all accounts, they feel inspired by this response.

The dearth of new arts journalistic talent coming through the ranks is a cause for concern. Informants suggested that this was one of the key challenges currently

⁵⁵ On behalf of Spier Estate.

facing arts journalism in South Africa. Informants also felt that the full potential of radio and TV, in particular, is not being exploited.

Coverage of the arts in Africa is poor, and the reasons behind the racial and gender biases in coverage need to be considered. It is important for editors to rethink the influence publicity has on arts coverage generally, as well as to give some attention to the needs of the different disciplines of arts journalism. Limiting budgets to commission freelance journalists and critics puts undue pressure on the already difficult conditions under which journalists and editors work.

Although arts coverage can be entertaining, it is not necessarily entertainment, and most informants interviewed for this study explicitly or implicitly made the distinction between entertainment content and arts coverage. The arts sector in South Africa is vast, with a range of disciplines, needs and requirements, interests, and changing possibilities. Despite the media's real limitations, coverage cannot simply be lumped into loosely defined lifestyle or entertainment categories, without losing much of this diversity. The gulf of dissatisfaction that exists between coverage and the needs of the arts community, and the evidence of a growing public interest in the arts, suggests that more space should be made available for arts coverage, not less.

While the balance between financial profitability and doing a good job can, no doubt, be tricky, taken as a whole, there is a strong suggestion that arts coverage in South Africa leans two-thirds in the wrong direction. Phrases like "buying into" or "target market" are frequently – and almost glibly – used by journalists and editors alike. They suggest how journalists are beginning to see themselves, and the roles that they are being asked to play. That it is reported that arts journalists are undervalued as professional journalists in the newsroom simply re-enforces this drift away from editorially independent and strong journalism.

The impact advertisers – and multinational publicity machines – have on arts coverage needs to be better understood and articulated. While coverage of dance is marginal compared to other arts, such as film or pop music, this is not simply the result of the media appealing to mass audience interests. As one informant pointed out, while the top-selling music genre in South Africa is gospel, it is mostly bought by poor black people (Ansell 2005. Int.). That it receives little widespread media coverage is suggestive.

It can be argued that the converse is also true. Despite reports of a decline in the number of cinema-goers, film coverage remains ubiquitous and comprehensive.⁵⁶ For many of the other arts, evidence of public disinterest results in less coverage. To what extent is the persistent coverage of film – sometimes at the expense of coverage of the other key arts genres – a tangible impact of film distributors' media spend and publicity muscle?

⁵⁶ If one includes review briefs produced for film listings, nearly all the films screened at cinema houses in South Africa receive some sort of write-up in the media. The same, however, cannot be said of books published by local publishers.

This study suggests that coverage predetermined by what most people will buy can hamper the development of culture more broadly: “[The media do] not allow culture to happen. Culture is a static commodity. Culture becomes, in the end, what has already been done. (Ibid.)

16. Recommendations

The following recommendations on how to improve the media's coverage of the arts in South Africa have been identified through the process of researching arts coverage in the mass media, and have been complimented by a panel discussion at the launch of the report 'hisses and whistles' on April 5th, 2006. They are to be read in conjunction with the key findings of the research report.

Understand the audience. There is a need to better understand audiences - both for the arts and for arts journalism. Audience or readership surveys are often focused on consumer habits, rather than interests or disinterests. It is important to strengthen independent research that can provide an alternative understanding of audience and reader interests, so that a balanced view of the public's interest in the arts and arts coverage can be developed.

Engage the SABC. While the SABC says it supports the arts and wants to encourage more arts coverage, it has no strategic approach to the arts. As a result, whether or not the arts are covered or how they get covered is left to the good will of management or individuals in management. At the same time, the SABC says that it is open to suggestions from the arts community. Engagement with the broadcaster is necessary. It should be encouraged to develop a strategic document to guide decisions on arts coverage at the broadcaster. There are many creative ways in which the arts community could engage with the SABC to improve and expand its current vision for arts coverage. The regional stations provide one potential area of engagement, given that the content strategy for the stations has not been properly developed at this stage. At the same time, the new local content mandate from ICASA provides a potential opportunity for the arts community to come forward with suggestions.

Train publicists. A key issue raised by many informants and by panellists was the skills levels of publicists. Given the crucial role publicists play in getting the arts on the news agenda, practical courses or workshops should be developed for publicists. These could cover issues such as 'creative publicity', 'understanding how the media works' as well as the more technical aspects of engaging the media.

Train artists. A number of people at the panel discussion identified the difficulty many artists have in engaging the media successfully. Issues are as basic as not turning up for interviews, or talking about their work in an inaccessible way. Training courses or workshops could be developed to coach artists on how to engage the media effectively. This potentially relates to the recommendation on training publicists.

Train journalists. The training of new arts journalists, both in the print and broadcast media needs to be addressed. There is a need to train journalists both as generalists and specialists. Particular emphasis needs to be placed on young journalists entering the field of journalism. An emphasis also needs to be placed on reporting the arts effectively within the current constraints of the newsroom. Given that many media houses are reluctant to send journalists on courses offered for arts journalism,

courses or workshops may need to be sponsored. The training of broadcast journalists (both radio and TV) in reporting the arts creatively is essential. Broadcast is not currently being used effectively as a medium to capture and reflect the arts in a way that is creative and stimulating for audiences. As one participant at the launch put it: "We will not scale up the standard of arts journalism until we invest in training." The need to train journalists relates to the recommendation on engaging media management.

Engage media management. Workshops or seminars on the importance of the arts and arts journalism involving media management (including editors and potentially arts editors more generally) could assist in raising the profile of the arts in media houses. Media managers need to be made aware of the potential audience interest in the arts, and given ideas on how the arts can be better covered. While the need to train arts journalists needs to be raised, issues such as the incentives for arts journalists (salaries or freelance rates etc.) are equally important. As one participant at the launch put it: "Management are the people that need to be lobbied. The arts are ruled by personal decisions." In particular, media management needs to be encouraged to emphasise:

- The diversity of the arts. A number of the key arts genres are under-reported. In particular, dance receives very poor coverage in the media. Cross-media reporting of genres needs to be encouraged. For instance, literature receives little coverage on TV (e.g. there is no 'books show') and the visual arts receive comparatively little coverage on radio;
- Multi-racial coverage of the arts. Black artists tend to be covered less than white artists. In part, this is due to the 'cultural gap' of understanding between white and black editors. A cross-cultural appreciation of the arts, and of cultural genres needs to be encouraged;
- The arts in the rest of Africa. The arts in countries outside of South Africa are not widely reported.
- A gender awareness in arts coverage. Although better, arts coverage shows similar symptoms of gender imbalances in coverage evident in many other forms of media coverage. A gender awareness needs to be developed in the newsroom.

Engage advertisers. One of the key issues raised by the research is an apparent lack of understanding of the arts and of the potential audience interest in the arts amongst advertisers.

Organise the arts community. In general, the arts community does not organise itself collectively to respond to media coverage, and to demand coverage from the media. This is said to be most notably the case when the SABC calls for input into its editorial policies, or ICASA calls for input into its broadcasting guidelines. While both BASA and the MMP have responded to these opportunities for public input, the arts community tends to remain silent. There is a potential need to create a collective front in the arts community to advocate for changes in media coverage. As one participant at the launch of the research report put it,: "People in the arts don't say anything. The more arts people start writing letters the better. For editors it becomes

a survey, in a way, that says people do read these things. Until we start writing those letters, we won't see anything." This lack of response was contrasted with readers' proactive responses to sports writing.

Research coverage trends in online and community media. The limitations of the current research into arts coverage meant that both online and community media could not be surveyed. However, one panelist suggested that much of the activity in arts coverage – even if it is not mass media coverage – occurs here. There is potential to research how community and online media responds to the arts, and what role they can and do play in supporting the arts generally.

Increase incentives for arts journalism broadly. Arts journalists need incentives to do good work. While recognising that ACT does offer an award for arts journalism, scholarships and bursaries, amongst them, could help to create a context of additional incentives for better coverage generally.

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18. Appendices

Appendix 1: Television and radio programmes monitored

Table 1: TV programmes monitored

No.	Broadcaster	Programme
1	e-tv	20 Something
2	e-tv	Box Office
3	e-tv	Shiz Niz
4	e-tv	The showbiz report
5	SABC 1	Street Journal
6	SABC 2	Curious Culture
7	SABC 2	National Arts Festival
8	SABC 2	Pasella
9	SABC 2	Weekend Life and Leisure
10	SABC 3	Top Billing

Table 2: Radio programmes monitored

No.	Broadcaster	Programme
1	SAfm	Between the Covers
2	SAfm	Cultural Exchange
3	Radio 702	Barry Ronge Show
5	Radio 702	No Jacket Required
6	Kaya FM	Kaya Talk

Appendix 2: Newspapers monitored

Table 3: Newspapers monitored

No.	Newspaper
1	Beeld
2	Business Day
3	Cape Times
4	The Citizen
5	City Press
6	Daily Dispatch
7	Daily Sun
8	Die Burger
9	The Herald
10	Ilanga
11	Independent on Saturday
12	Isolezwe
13	Mail & Guardian
14	The Mercury
15	Rapport
16	Saturday Star
17	Sowetan
18	The Star
19	The Sunday Independent
20	Sunday Times
21	Sunday Tribune
22	Sunday World
23	The Weekend Argus

Appendix 3: List of informants

Table 4: List of informants

No.	Name		Designation
1	Accone	Darryl	Former arts critic and editor, writer, trainer
2	Ansell	Gwen	Music critic, media trainer
3	Cock	Richard	Arts promoter, musician
4	Constant	Michelle	Arts journalist
5	De Klerk	Jenny	Sub-editor
6	De Klerk	TJ	Owner and manager (Artslink.co.za)
7	Greenwall	Nicky	Presenter
8	Greig	Robert	Arts and culture editor
9	Johnson	Neil	Media manager
10	Kantor	Lara	Media manager
11	Keene-Young	Bronwyn	Channel director
12	Krouse	Matthew	Arts editor
13	Lewington	Glenn	Executive producer
14	Madondo	Bongani	Arts journalist
15	Memela	Sandile	Department of Arts and Culture, former arts journalist and editor
16	Pope	Russell	Media manager
17	Pretorius	William	Freelance critic
18	Rangongo	Rafora	Editor
19	Sapieka	Joy	Publicist
20	Scoombie	Schalk	(former) Entertainment supplement editor
21	Sichel	Adrienne	Arts journalist
22	Sikwebu	Dinga	Freelance arts journalist
23	Smith	Gail	Entertainment supplement editor
24	Trout	Desire	Media promotion
25	van Graan	Mike	Cultural activist, columnist
26	Walker	Janine	Entertainment supplement editor
27	Anonymous	(MM, 2005. Int.)	Media management
28	Anonymous	(Journ, 2005. Int.)	Arts journalist
29	Anonymous	(Publicist, 2005. Int.)	Arts publicist and administrator

Appendix 4: Products advertised during the monitored period

Table 5: Products advertised

Product	Count
Food (products relating to food including restaurants)	157
Business/Finance (e.g. banking, financial services, insurance)	98
Travel and accommodation	86
Competition	84
Education	75
Technology (e.g. cell phones, copiers, office equipment)	74
Home-ware: (e.g. vacuum cleaners, toilet cleaners, disinfectants, lounge suites)	70
Medical (e.g. HIV/AIDS, impotency)	70
Adornments (e.g. perfume, clothing, jewellery)	51
Media	51
Cars	32
Personal hygiene (e.g. sanitary pads, tampons, other products directly linked to women's hygiene)	23
Tobacco/Alcohol	20
Sport	13

Appendix 5: Tabulated responses to online survey

A total of 49 responses were received. As the table below suggests, respondents represented a wide range of disciplines and fields, and varying interests in the arts. Of the 49 respondents, 14% offered a positive evaluation of the media's coverage of the arts, 61% offered a negative evaluation, and 25% offered no evaluation. Some perspectives offered, which have not been captured in this report, are presented in Appendix 6.

Table 6: Disciplines or areas of work of respondents

Areas of work/discipline of respondents	Primary discipline of respondents	Secondary discipline of respondents
Academic, student	3	
Actor, director, producer, playwright	7	2
Arts and culture publication editor	2	
Arts facilitator	1	
Audience	3	
Community arts	3	1
Community media	1	
Dance	4	
Events organiser, venue manager	2	
Film/TV production company	1	
Visual artist	3	3
Gallery manager, owner	1	
Journalist, critic	4	4
Legal (entertainment lawyer)	1	
Musician	4	2
Poet, poetry editor	5	1
Publicist	3	
Writer	1	7
Total	49	20

Table 7: Evaluation of media coverage by genre

Genre of coverage	Positive	Negative	No evaluation
Theatre	1	8	
Dance		1	
Literature	1	3	
Music		4	
Film	1		
Visual arts		4	
General	4	10	
Total	7	30	12
%	14	61	25

Appendix 6: Comments from respondents to online survey

"The media could be more committed to presenting the South African performing arts scene as valuable. Why the colourful page advertises for concerts of overseas artists, and then one line mentioning that some South African band is playing at some venue or other?"

"Instead of a question, 'How did you come up with those radical harmonies between the guitar and bass?', we get instead, 'How would you describe your music?'. The latter question is obviously up to the journalist to describe and NOT the musician - but this question is asked at every interview; because simply they have no clue."

"Newcomers and amateurs are being ignored; heck, even being reduced to having a cringe factor placed on them."

"Too many magazines try to cater for every discipline. The result is unstimulating content with little substance. Radio is probably the most accessible medium. In time we should be looking at a national arts radio station."

"Too many artists are masquerading as art critics. It has become increasingly fashionable to be both; but I personally consider the two endeavours to be mutually exclusive. I find it impossible to reconcile honest artistic endeavour with the public critique of others' work."

"The arts are generally sidelined on TV and that is sad. Tabloid journalism has replaced objective, intelligent assessment of art; specifically in the performing arts. Surely the print media should be lambasting the television stations for the appalling quality of product being thrown onto our screens? Instead all they do is reproduce the marketing splurbs of the channels and production houses."

"I'd like to make a practical suggestion that will work: Get the various editors of the poetry journals to advise you. *Timbila*, *New Coin*, *Chimurenga*, *Botsotso*, *Green Dragon*, www.sweetmagazine.co.za, *Fidelities*, *Kotaz*, *Carapace* - this is where poetry is happening. Bring the editors of these journals on to your programme, give them guest columns in your arts pages, and they will point you to the country's poets."

"What is even more worrying is that the established critics at the various newspapers and magazines write mostly about what and who they know, and are not willing to risk their opinion on exhibitions or artists that are either doing something a little 'risky', or exhibitions that are a little more difficult to digest, or that do not fit into the accepted paradigm."

"If a Sunday newspaper fires its arts reporter specialist and closes its arts page without a public outcry, the conclusion the media bosses make is that the public won't miss arts coverage."

"If media could differentiate between big and small business with regard to advert fees and freebies it could benefit role players."

"I think a certain disinterest and 'laziness' to attend the events has also caused the demise of arts coverage. They really need to be taken to task and challenged. We pay huge amounts of money to advertise in the print media, and to get one word re: the event in the paper/s is very hard work."

"Publicists really do allow grassroots organizations such as ourselves to gain access to the media and ensure that people get to know about our work. I would say that without people like them we would not be at the point that we are currently. Direct approaches to the media often do not amount to much, and without an introduction by someone with a good reputation, the media is often not available to us."

"There is a lack of understanding of what the role of a critic in relation to the readership and the professional arts community [should be]. They haven't been given a proper brief or understanding of their position. Another area that upsets a lot of people is the time it takes for a review to get out, after the critic has been to the opening night of the exhibition or show."

"The broadcasters also do not seem to have any form of investment in programmes on art; other than those which will cater to the sound bite generation. Anything that is more in depth seems to be ignored. I can think of a whole collection of influential South African artists who should be on the South African schools' syllabus, and who should be featured on the broadcast media in the form of informative documentaries."

"I hesitate to prescribe that the media mind their p's and q's in a pc kind of way so as not to offend. More pc we don't need. What we'd really like, of course, is for the media to be convincing in their claim to be serious about the arts."