

**‘The Most Amazing Show’: Performative interactions with post-
election South African society and culture**

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Abstract

This research investigates contemporary South African performance within the context of prominent social and cultural change following the political transition from an apartheid state to democracy. Specifically, it looks at the relationship between a popular comic variety show, *The Most Amazing Show (TMAS)*, and aspects of contemporary South African society and culture, particularly relating to prominent efforts to affect post-election transformation of South African society and culture through the construction of a South African 'rainbow nation'. By analysing *TMAS* in terms of broader historical, performative and discursive contexts, it engages a relational reading of the performance.

The study argues that *TMAS* both challenges and participates in the manner in which rainbow nation discourse constructs South African society and culture. Firstly, it considers the performance's construction of hybrid South African identities, including white Afrikaans, white English and white masculine identities. It argues that these reconstructions undermine the tendency within rainbow nation discourse to construct cultural hybridity in terms of stereotypically distinct identities. Secondly, it considers *TMAS*' construction of collective experience and social integration, which subverts the often glamorised and superficial representations of social healing and integration that are constructed within rainbow nation discourse.

The analysis makes prominent reference to the notion of 'liminality' in order to describe the manner in which *TMAS* constructs significance within the tension that it establishes *between* oppositional, and often contradictory, positions. Furthermore, it attempts to establish a link between this notion of liminality and notions of theatrical syncretism that are prominent in contemporary South African theatre scholarship, and emphasise processes of signification that are constantly shifting and unstable.

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Chapter One: Introduction and methodological concerns

Much recent writing about South African performance concerns changes in and around theatrical production following the political transition from an apartheid state to a constitutional democracy. This transition dates back to the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990, followed by negotiations for an interim constitution, democratic elections in 1994, and the adoption of a new constitution in 1996 (Atkinson & Buhlungu, 2007; Davis, 2003a; Hauptfleisch, 1997; Solberg, 2003; Vandenbroucke, 2003). However, the transformation from apartheid to democracy extends beyond political change and has unfolded and continues to unfold – at social, cultural and economic levels long after the structural dismantling of the apartheid state.

The premise of this study is that performance is embedded in social, cultural, economic as well as political processesⁱ, and therefore well placed to reflect and participate in these processes. In times of rapid change, the interrelatedness of forms of performance and the contexts in which they take place may become particularly defined, and shifts in both context and performance boldly delineated. Post-electionⁱⁱ South Africa, which has been characterised by dramatic social and cultural transformation, thus provides a fertile ground for exploring the interrelatedness of performance and its contexts. In addition, the pre-eminence of Cultural Studies and related fields within the humanities has focused interest on the relationship between cultural representations, such as performance, and historical and material contexts. For these reasons, considerable critical attention has been devoted in the post-election period to the interaction of theatrical production and processes of transformation within South Africa.

The current study stems from this body of research and aims to extend it by analysing a popular contemporary performance – *The Most Amazing Show (TMAS)* – within the current South African context, and specifically in terms of its interaction with continuing processes of social and cultural transformation. Importantly, it seeks to analyse *TMAS* in relationship to recurring concerns in the critical literature.

TMAS is a comic performance that has run since 2001. It centres on two characters; ‘Corné’ (Louw Venter) and ‘Twakkie’ (Rob van Vuuren), who host a variety show of sorts entitled ‘*The Most Amazing Show*’. The characters’ appearances and accents are over-the-top and

strange, but also firmly rooted in a South African cultural idiom. They are constructed as clowns and foils for each other, and comedy is derived from their ridiculous behaviour, the power struggles between them, and the manner in which they struggle, stumble and bluff their way through what is often *not* the 'most amazing show'. Performances are partially scripted but follow a largely improvisational structure, incorporating a great deal of audience involvement. Comedy is also derived from these interactions, and often from the manner in which audience members are humiliated. Furthermore, the work is satirical, lampooning aspects of contemporary culture and in particular the media, advertising and consumerism.

Since its inception *TMAS* has played in a wide variety of venues and contexts throughout South Africa, and even abroad. It has been performed in informal contexts such as theatre bars, restaurant theatres and music festivals, as well as in more formal theatrical contexts. In general, its audiences are middle class, young and white, and it has developed something of a cult following within this demographic. However, it has also achieved exposure to other demographics, for example via television and Schools' Festival performances to predominantly black audiences. Indications are that it has been well received in these contexts as well (Clayton, L., pers. com., March 3, 2007).

The first two chapters of this study construct an overview of trends of post-election performance that also outlines the substance of recurring critical concerns. My aim is to initially locate *TMAS* within post-election trends in performance that at the same time outline themes for analysis. Chapter Two sketches out practical conditions and prominent concerns that influence current theatrical production and provide a context for *TMAS*. Chapter Three focuses more specifically on the issue of social transformation via performance. Finally, Chapter Four brings these themes into dialogue with *TMAS* in a case study of two performances, building an argument for its engagement with processes of social and cultural transformation in post-election South Africa, which is drawn together in Chapter Five.

My intention throughout these chapters is to engage in a 'relational reading strategy', which concerns "the dialectic that is established *between*, texts when they are read in relation to one another" (Flockemann, 2001:27). Specifically, *TMAS* is read in relation to other South African performances, as well as personal observations and critical writing on performance and culture in academic and public contexts. This follows Miki Flockemann's call for readings of theatrical works that are situated "in the context of observations by writers and

cultural critics (both in the popular media and academic journals), about South African cultural production” (Flockemann, 2001:27).

The relational reading follows a hermeneutic cycle that moves dialectically between the research material (that is, the specific performances) and the themes for analysis (that is, the conceptual categories that structure the analysis of this material). This follows Clarke’s clarification of hermeneutics as a “continual oscillation between text and context, comparing one with the other, indeed more like a spiral than a circle” (1992:45). So, themes that arise from a first engagement with the material determine the way in which the material is further explored, which in turn generates a more refined selection of themes (Brooke, 1991; Clarke, 1992; Creswell, 1994; Kelly & Terre Blanche, 2002; Kvale, 1996).

In the current research this proceeds roughly in three phases:

1. The selection of *TMAS* as focus of study because of its apparent relevance to aspects of contemporary South African society and culture, particularly relating to continuing processes of post-election transformation and the opposing movement towards and away from integration and reconciliation that have played out around these;
2. Themes for analysis dialectically derived from (a) continuing observations of *TMAS* performances, and (b) research and reflections on performance and aspects of South African society and culture; and
3. An interpretive case study relating two *TMAS* performances with derived themes.

My analysis of *TMAS* concerns its function as a total ‘event’. This relates to the concern with the ‘embeddedness’ of performance that I introduced at the beginning of this chapter, and emphasises the role of broad contextual features in the reading of a specific work. I will discuss this approach in greater detail in Chapter Four. The important point here is that my view as researcher, as well as the views that I select in order to frame my interpretations, forms part of the reading and must be made explicit (Durrheim & Terreblanche, 2002).

Particularly, my position as a 28 year old, white, middle class Afrikaans woman with a predominantly English educational and theatrical background is expressed in my perspectives as well as those that I have chosen to consult. For example, I selected interview subjects on the basis of their widely held expertise in fields of interest to me. Retrospectively however,

this displayed a predominantly white and educated demographic. Similarly, my selection of newspaper references, which reflects mainly Mail & Guardian publications, reveals the 'white liberal' bias of my sphere of access and interest. It must also be noted that the subject of this study is largely English language performance, which remains predominantly middle-class in construction and consumption. I have attempted to contextualise this work in broader realities of South African life and performance, to which I have also been sensitised through community-based performance, but the parameters of my personal frame of reference still influence my views. It must be noted that this constitutes the lens that has influenced my research design and analysis.

The terms 'performance' and 'theatre' feature prominently in this study and as the distinction between them is itself a field of critical debate (touched on in Chapter Three), I will briefly clarify how I use them. The understanding that I assume is that 'theatre' denotes the kind of performance that has evolved within the infrastructure and conventions of the Western theatrical tradition, although it has been much expanded through its contact with other performance forms, and particularly so in the South African contextⁱⁱⁱ. 'Performance' denotes a much broader field that encompasses a range of cultural traditions as well as – as I will suggest in Chapter Three – social action (Turner, 1982). My often-interchangeable use of the terms reflects the language of the literature reviewed, in which notions of 'performance' and 'theatre' frequently overlap, as well as the dual focus of my analysis. I analyse *TMAS* as 'theatre' in terms of its relationship to trends in South African theatre production, but as 'performance' in terms of its relationship with social and cultural processes.

The following chapter locates *TMAS* in the broad set of structural, economic and social circumstances, as well as thematic concerns, that relate to South Africa's transition to democracy and that frame contemporary performance in the country. It substantiates the premise of the 'embeddedness' of performance mentioned in Chapter One, which grounds the central concern of this study: the relationship between transformation and performance in the South African context.

1. Infrastructure and economics: the challenges of post-election theatre-production

1.1. Diminished funding

A useful starting point for a discussion of post-election theatre production is the fundamental shift that has taken place in the practical conditions of theatre making in South Africa. This constitutes a baseline change that frames all post-election developments and trends. It is also clearly the context out of which *TMAS* has arisen.

A number of factors have contributed to significantly-reduced funding for the arts, the performing arts, and theatre in particular, in post-election South Africa. The disbanding of the apartheid Performing Arts Councils and the formation of a central funding body (the National Arts Council [NAC]) was designed to give individual companies access to state funding (Davis, 2003a; Fleishman in Solberg, 2003; Hauptfleisch, 1997; Huisamen, T., pers. com., March 17, 2007). However, in a country that faces immense challenges of poverty, allocation of funds to the arts has been limited and increasingly diminished support has been particularly strongly felt by theatre (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003; Hauptfleisch, 2006; Honeyman in Solberg, 2003; Solberg 2003). This has been exacerbated by claimed mismanagement of funds in government and in the NAC (Purkey, 2005; Van Graan in Solberg, 2003; Van Graan, 2004c). Even with the contributions of alternative funding bodies, funds fall far short of artists' requirements (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003).

The result is that theatre practitioners have struggled to make work, and if they have managed to do it, to sustain any projects long-term^{iv}. Mark Fleishman, who runs Magnet theatre in Cape Town, describes a situation in which "...you are constantly setting up projects, beginning the whole process, and then the money runs out, the process closes down, and the next time you are able to raise money you start the process all over again from scratch" (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003:56). The danger of a situation in which few projects are sustained long term is that the work becomes *ad hoc*. It is not framed by any long-term vision nor is it located within an ongoing process of development or exploration. Practitioners have expressed concern about this trend and its implications for the quality of theatre production in general (Botha, S., pers. com., July 7, 2007; Fleishman in Solberg, 2003).

1.2. Funding agendas

A further issue that arises with regards the new system of funding is the impact of funding agendas – perceived or real – on theatre production. Indications are that funding choices are motivated by the political imperatives of the post-election state. These include the drive for cultural, racial and gender representivity, the restoration of indigenous histories and cultures, as well as the formation of a new, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South African nation (Clayton, L., pers. com., March 3, 2007; Van Graan, M., pers. com., May 1, 2007)". Whether or not this is entirely accurate, proposals for theatre projects are often geared to meet these criteria (Van Graan, 2004a). This includes working with multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-gendered casts, dealing with aspects of local culture and history, as well as processes of reconciliation and identity-formation related to the construction of a new South African nation. 'Representivity' and 'relevance' are the operative words.

Similarly, theatres that rely on government funding experience pressure to stage works that comply with its priorities (Solberg, 2003), while the agendas of independent theatres often correspond closely with those of government. Hence John Kani, the director of The Market Theatre in Johannesburg, says: "These days only projects that contribute to nation building and to the preservation of indigenous cultures are likely to catch the management's eye" (Solberg, 2003:9). In sum: "(f)unding for culture in post-apartheid South Africa is a political quagmire..." (Purkey, 2005:307).

While I would not contest the validity of certain funding criteria in the context of social reconstruction and the development of a non-racial and non-sexist society, there is substance to concerns about the long-term effects of harnessing cultural production to a specific ideological end (Van Graan, 2004a). Adherence to a narrow agenda may limit the themes of theatrical production and the way in which they are explored. Within a confined ideological focus, there is little room for the ambiguity or contradiction that frequently makes for the most interesting and evocative art. One would conclude from these points that in order for artists to produce varied and innovative works, they should not be shackled by considerations of value or purpose. However, this overlooks a further concern, which is that the social function of the arts can also be limited by political constraints.

Indeed, concern about the impact of political agendas in the contemporary context is not only focused on questions of artistic merit, it also considers the implications of funding agendas for the engagement of the arts with a developing democracy. Regardless of any implications for the quality of the work, deference to 'political correctness' can suppress sentiments that are critical, confrontational, or irreverent, which so often lie at the core of artistic engagement with the world. In this way, artistic adherence to an ideological imperative may end up suppressing critical reflection on the status quo and on the manner in which democratisation is being pursued (Van Graan, 2006a; pers. com., May 1, 2007). While work is produced under the ruse of serving the democratic project it can end up working against it (Hauptfleisch, 1997). I will argue that works such as *TMAS*, which are influenced by commercial rather than political constraints, may in this regard be better placed to engage critically with a developing society.

1.3. Commercialisation of theatre

The constraints of diminished funding and political agendas have increasingly driven theatre practitioners to produce their own work, outside of established companies or institutions (Van Graan, 2007). Temple Hauptfleisch remarks that "(t)he industry has switched remarkably in the last ten years – it's turned on its head. It's become a totally self-generating thing, where you have to make work for yourself" (Hauptfleisch in Solberg, 2003:45). Smaller companies and independent groupings continually emerge, and different venues have formed to accommodate their work. 'Theatre bars', 'restaurant theatres' and 'café theatres' have emerged over recent years to cater for increasingly small-scale and informal performances (Flockemann in Solberg, 2003; Hauptfleisch in Solberg, 2003). *TMAS* is an example of such a grouping, which emerged around one such venue, The Independent Armchair Theatre, in Cape Town.

It started as informal evening entertainment, with only two performers and minimal costumes, sets and effects. From here it went on to play at various festivals and theatres around the country, adapting to larger, more traditional theatre spaces. While it has been reworked for television^{vi} and continues to play in larger venues, it has retained the characteristic informal and intimate quality of its initial stagings.

In this regard *TMAS* is plainly a product of its time in a way that demonstrates the economic (and more indirectly political, social and cultural) 'embeddedness' of theatre. It exemplifies a particular artistic response to a set of economic and political conditions. Part of my interest in this study is how the performance is both typical of a certain historical moment, and highly inventive within this framework. Furthermore, I will suggest that it harnesses some of its most typical features, or those most representative of its economic, political and artistic contexts, to construct something uniquely relevant to its time that is also able to speak back to it.

While the emergence of independent work and new formats for performance suggests a high level of creative activity, it must be noted that these developments are subject to a different set of constraints. Unfettered by political agendas, they are limited instead by commercial demands. The impact of commercial incentives on South African theatre in general is much debated in the contemporary context in which diminished funds are even increasing the dependence of established theatres on ticket sales (Barnes, 2005; Marais, L., pers. com., February 26, 2007; Solberg, 2003). Flockemann describes the "cold marketing eye" behind the Baxter theatre's production choices that are "determined by the marketability of that particular product" (Flockemann in Solberg, 2003:29).

To an extent this reflects a global "edging towards intensive commercialisation which favours market forces and consumer demands over "socially valuable" or "culturally significant" products that are supported by public funding" (Bain, 2003:149). However, it is intensified in the South African context by an apparently diminished post-election interest in theatrical performance (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003; Akerman in interview by Krueger, 2003, Purkey, 2005; Vandenbroucke, 2003)^{vii}. The reality is therefore that people are less inclined to go to the theatre, while theatre-makers are more dependent on their attendance. In this situation the dictates of commercialism are particularly stringent and there is little room for taking risks^{viii}. I will return to resulting concerns about the quality of contemporary theatre production. First however, it is useful to outline a number of factors that contribute to low attendance, as they indicate the substance of current commercial demands.

The most immediate explanations for low attendance are practical. In a widely impoverished South Africa theatre is simply an unaffordable luxury for most people. Not only is it expensive, as poor subsidization increasingly pushes up ticket prices, but decoupled from its

original functions of ritual and social cohesion, it is not clearly relevant to people's lives (Bain, 2003). In addition theatres are often far away from major residential areas, and poorly accessible by public transport. Security issues in urban areas where theatres are located also have an impact, although this has to some extent been addressed in recent years (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003; Solberg 2003).

Other factors that have contributed to decreasing theatre attendance and that have influenced commercial production include the rise of the popular media, as well as a general aversion to 'serious' theatre. I will consider each in some detail as both are addressed by the commercial formula that *TMAS* has developed, but also as I will argue, harnessed to critical social response.

Bain writes that it is the "juggernaut of mass-produced entertainment synergies (dominated by television)", that is most threatening to theatre in the current battle for an audience (2003:149). Worldwide trends in the popular media – such as the voyeuristically appealing phenomenon of 'reality' television – increasingly contend with live performance for viewers (Bain, 2003; Huisamen, T., pers. com., March 17, 2007). Together with increasingly more advanced and affordable technology, it has become easier and cheaper – and often more desirable – to stay at home and watch films or television than to go to a live performance (Hauptfleisch, 1997; Hauptfleisch in Solberg, 2003).

Theatre has responded in two ways. On the one hand it attempts to replicate features of the popular media, on the assumption that this is what audiences know and / or want (Barnes, 2005). Hence there are indications of a drive to make work that is faster, funnier, more upbeat, spectacular and titillating (Akerman in Krueger, 2003). On the other hand, it has asserted itself in the face of the media onslaught by emphasizing that which distinguishes live performance from media. In this regard, some practitioners have harnessed the evocative potential of enclosed or demarcated performance spaces. Sylvaine Strike (*The Travellers* [2005], *Coupé* [2006]) is particularly adept at constructing a suggestive and atmospheric theatricality. Other practitioners, such as Brett Bailey (*iMumbo Jumbo* [1997], *The Prophet* [1999]) have harnessed the immediacy of performance, and its construction as a social event and an encounter between people. Chapter Three discusses works that emphasize live encounter within the framework of ritual and ceremony.

In Chapter Four I argue that *TMAS* interestingly straddles both of these responses. In one sense it is clearly an expression of a culture that is dominated by the global media. On the other hand, however, it signals a return to that which characterises live performance, particularly emphasizing immediacy and encounter, and it also constructs a scathing reflection on the popular media and the commercial culture that sustains it. In this sense, it simultaneously participates in this culture, and challenges it.

The second influence on diminished interest in performance that recurs in the literature is what appears to be a general aversion in the aftermath of the struggle to weighty subject matters and a preference for light, undemanding entertainment (Robinson, 2004; Rudakoff, 2004). Hauptfleisch comments that directly after the political transition “people opted for very light farcical entertainment values. That was all they were interested in ... after twenty years of struggle – in whatever form you saw it – people were just tired of it, and they felt they would like relief” (Hauptfleisch in Solberg 2003:47). Although he goes on to describe a gradually-returning interest in theatre that addresses issues, there is evidence that something of this sentiment has remained, and the common perception is still that audiences primarily want to laugh (Akerman quoted in interview by Krueger, 2003:64).

David Kornhaber (2004) compares theatre in Cape Town a decade after the end of institutional apartheid with the South African productions presented in New York during the same period. He points out that while the New York performances dealt directly with painful matters regarding the country’s past, the Cape Town works steered away from South African realities and were light in tone – “entertainment pure and simple” (Kornhaber, 2004:1). Kornhaber (2005) echoes Hauptfleisch’s (2003) earlier impression of a reluctance to deal with painful realities, particularly those related to the country’s past. He points out that “(r)eliving the atrocities of past years simply does not seem like an appealing prospect to most Capetonians” (Kornhaber, 2005:1). He suggests that the prevalence of more flippant entertainment indicates a need to look to a hopeful future. Kornhaber writes: “Though Cape Town’s theater offerings may seem at first more frivolous than those in New York, taken together they present a compelling picture of a city and a nation trying to lay out a course for its second decade of democracy” (2005:1).

In line with this view it may be argued that part of what draws people to the entertainment-driven media is that it offers escape or diversion from painful realities, and a positive

experience of life and the world. Presumably this function is similarly appealing within live performance, which would account for popular preferences for theatre that is light and entertaining, rather than intellectually or emotionally challenging (Akerman in Krueger, 2003).

Having said this, there are those who argue that audiences are more open to being challenged by 'serious' theatre than practitioners presume, and that they are being patronised by the kind of work that is offered to them (Akerman quoted in interview by Krueger, 2003; Van Graan, 2006b). Van Graan makes an example of his production of *Green Man Flashing* (2004), which dealt with weighty subject matter and received good audience support (2006b; pers. com., May 1, 2007). Lara Foot-Newton's successful *Tshepang* (2003), which deals with the harrowing South African reality of baby rape, could be cited as another example (Marais, L., pers. com., February 26, 2007). On another occasion however, Van Graan emphasizes the difficulty of making a living in the South African theatre industry, which seems to contradict his comments about public interest in more provocative work. The bottom line is that serious works that are commercially successful are few and far between, which supports the common perception that South African audiences mainly want light entertainment.

As a result, a significant proportion of post-election productions fall under the category of 'light entertainment'. In large established theatres as well as new venues that are tellingly termed 'commercial' (such as casino theatres and 'Barnyard' theatres) this includes musicals (locally produced or imported) such as *My Fair Lady*, *Marvelously Modern Millie*, *The Lion King* and *Hairspray*; musical revivals such as *We Will Rock You* and *Abbamaniacs* (2005 – 2007), farces, pantomimes and revues. In smaller informal venues cabarets and stand-up comedies are popular (Buckland, D., pers. com., February 4, 1994; Hauptfleisch in Solberg, 2003; Hauptfleisch, 2006; Rudakoff, 2004; Van Graan, M., pers. com., May 1, 2007).

On the festival circuit, which I will discuss in more detail in section 2.4, there is an array of light and fairly formulaic comedies that return year upon year and unfailingly draw audiences, while new and more serious shows flounder. Amongst the most notable "stock productions or repeats" (Hauptfleisch, 2006:192) at the annual Grahamstown National Arts Festival are *Raiders*, *Hoot^x*, *Black Mamba*, *Joe Barber*, *Starwors* and *Stef's Sidesplitting Hypnosis* (2005 – 2007) (Marais, L., pers. com., February 26, 2007). *TMAS*, which unfailingly draws audiences with what is to some extent also a comic formula, could be

added to the list of standard comic fare that is the mainstay of festival fringes as well as year-long theatre programmes.

There is considerable concern amongst scholars and practitioners about the effect of commercial imperatives, given audience preferences (real or perceived), on the quality of South African performance. In 2002 Malcolm Purkey comments on the “dubious quality” of new productions (2005:307). Bain expresses a prevalent concern about increasing “capitulation” to commercial demands for frivolity and formulae (2003:149). In a harsh indictment of the trajectory of contemporary South African theatre, he summarises the situation as follows:

Everywhere, the obituaries of new and serious writing are being written, while musicals and more commercially viable cabarets, revues and stand-up comedy shows remain the major theatre drawcards. Worldwide, the theatre zeitgeist smacks of faddishness, trend-spotting and political somnolence. Caught in the overspill of Hollywood plasticity, live theatre is increasingly pressurised to redefine itself in terms of an expanding global entertainment industry ... perceptions prevail that theatre is increasingly devoid of drama; spectacle and spectacular entertainment are the main forces which now inspire our stages and attempt to fill our auditoria. Theatrical tragedy is tragically forgotten and thought-provoking parody has descended into “penis, pussy and ‘pomp’” jokes. Where audiences do exist they flock to frequently prosaic drink-and-view send-ups of popular music and stand-up soliloquies flaunting the cheapest in debased humour and try-hard political incorrectness. Everywhere the bums-on-seats machine is ensuring that entertainment is prioritised over serious theatre.

(Bain, 2003:149-50)

My impression is that many scholars and practitioners would associate the success of *TMAS* with this scenario. This was confirmed by the veiled reactions of shock and disdain that I encountered when I informed people of the focus of my research. In some cases a reservation about the quality or substance of the work was explicitly articulated.

Interestingly, the creators of *TMAS* were similarly shocked when I informed them of my intention to research the performance, which suggests that they themselves at some level buy into this perception. I will briefly consider the basis of such a view.

As suggested in Chapter One, *TMAS* has become a popular feature within the South African theatre landscape, drawing a theatre audience that is often young and relatively unsophisticated in terms of its exposure to theatre. It has actively marketed a style of comedy (tellingly referred to as a ‘brand’ of comedy [in the *TMAS* blurb in the 2005 Standard Bank National Schools Festival booklet]) that incorporates what is regarded as the most

primitive forms of humour – slapstick, and jokes of the sexual and less frequently, scatological kind. Furthermore, it integrates performance forms that stand in direct competition with theatre in the current South African context, including aspects of the popular media, and stand-up comedy.

Given these features it is interesting that Van Vuuren has a training and background in theatre that is much more marginal in terms of popular taste^x, and both performers devise, perform and at times even direct more ‘artistically innovative’ work outside of their involvement with *TMAS*. Most recently, Van Vuuren performed in *Brother Number* (2007) and Venter in *Out of Time* (2007), which are more script- and physical theatre-based works. The impression that this creates, and I have encountered this view, is that the performers use *TMAS* to secure a living for themselves and to fund their involvement with other, more mature and artistically innovative works. In this sense, *TMAS* emerges as an artistic ‘sell-out’ that does little more than pander to popular tastes and perpetuate the commercialisation of South African theatre.

Bain (2003) considers Bill Flynn’s concurrent involvement (in 2000/2001) with a serious production of *Death of a Salesman* and a popular breakfast television programme entitled *The Toasty Show*. He describes Flynn as a “representative of two very different despairing souls, the performer as artist attempting to sustain good-quality, traditional (Western) theatre, and the artist as businessman tackling the commercial entertainment desires of a nation with fairly moderate tastes and expectations” (2003:150). This view may be applied to Van Vuuren and Venter. My impression however, which I attempt to substantiate within this research, is that *TMAS* is among some of their most interesting work.

The assumption that is implicit in Bain’s analysis is that popular appeal or commercial success inevitably signals artistic surrender. This view should be approached with caution (Campbell, 1996a; Kaplan, 1996). Bain himself recognises the reality that “(i)n most areas of cultural development, distinctions between critical and commercial work are becoming irrelevant as all manner of marginalia are absorbed into the mainstream” (2003:150). Furthermore, there are significant and highly-respected figures in South African theatre who value theatre that is popular and accessible, and have devoted considerable skill to the creation of such works (Barnes, 2005). Deon Opperman is a prominent example, but Nicholas Ellenbogen, Greig Coetzee and Andrew Buckland also come to mind. Certainly the

ability to draw a wide range of people into theatres, and speak to them in an idiom that they relate to, is not to be scorned at. Moreover it need not exclude the possibility of dealing with significant issues, or doing so in manner that does not capitulate to staid formulae or cheap tricks (Turner, 1982).

On the contrary, as Flockemann (in Solberg, 2003) suggests, commercial pressures may demand novel and more inventive approaches to theatre making. She argues: "I also think that this (state subsidies) might have been a kind of straight-jacket. I think the whole notion of independence is an interesting one in terms of theatre. I am quite positive that ingenuity will – out of necessity – have to flourish..." (Flockemann in Solberg, 2003:6). Although the focus of this research is primarily on questions of social function and commentary and less on questions of artistic value, I will suggest that the originality of *TMAS*' response to contemporary circumstances substantiates Flockemann's assertion.

With regards to the quality of works that meet commercial demands, it should also be noted that commercial success can prolong the duration of productions in a context in which, as stated earlier, it has become difficult to sustain projects long-term. While an extended run can cause a performance to grow stale, time can also afford it the opportunity to be refined and crafted. *TMAS*' commercial success has allowed it to run for an unusually long period. In its case, the danger of stagnation has been curbed by the fact that the work is largely improvised within a basic structure, which is regularly changed. Having watched earlier versions of the show as well as recent ones, my opinion is that the work has grown significantly since 2001, becoming more layered, rich and complex. Also, that which is most distinctive and provocative about the performance has been crystallized and brought into sharper focus. Furthermore, as I argue in Chapter Four, its continuity within the South African context has allowed it to engage in a particular way with this context. In this sense, the extended duration afforded by commercial success may be associated with increased artistic and social value, as opposed to degeneration.

This research defends the claim that *TMAS*' popularity and commercial success does not signal its slavish compliance with the dictates of commercialism. Rather, the performance plays on these features in order to reflect upon aspects of (1) an increasingly commercialised theatre industry that is, as Bain points out, "necessarily influenced (or "corrupted") by economic interests", and (2) a society in which, as Bain further suggests,

“the distinction between artistic and commercial practices is blurred” (2003:149).

Furthermore, I would add that *TMAS*’ commentary extends to the manner in which contemporary society blurs the distinction between socially-motivated and commercially-motivated practices (2003:149).

1.4. The festival circuit

Factors outlined above have contributed to a mushrooming arts festival circuit in post-election South Africa (Hauptfleisch, 2006). In an increasingly free-lance industry, festivals give artists an affordable platform on which to present work. Furthermore, they draw audiences by presenting a variety of activities and forms of entertainment – from shopping, eating out, drinking and partying, to an array of live performances – within a tightly packaged event (Hauptfleisch, 2006). More and more, people attend theatre at festivals, where transport and safety is also often less of a concern. In the contemporary context they have become complete social and cultural events that serve changed needs of audiences and artists alike^{xi}.

The predominance of the festival circuit has resulted in the prevalence of what may be regarded as the typical ‘festival work’ – more or less one hour in length, economically cast and staged, very mobile, and focused on providing entertainment (Hauptfleisch in Solberg, 2003; Huisamen, T., pers. com., March 17, 2007)^{xii}. It reflects current demands to make work quickly, with few resources and little reliance on any institutional support.

Hauptfleisch states: “The common denominator seems to be *smaller*, something that could be packaged easily, could be done by a couple of friends working together as a group, quickly splitting up and going elsewhere” (original italics) (in Solberg, 2003:47). It is also rooted in the characteristic South African style (discussed in Chapter Three) that evolved outside of the infrastructure of apartheid state-subsidised theatres and therefore had to be cheap and mobile. Often it displays a similar emphasis on comedy and a reliance on the musicality, physical expressiveness and energy of performers, who play multiple parts through quick transitions^{xiii} (Marais, L., pers. com., February 26, 2007; Hauptfleisch, 1997).

As a relatively low-budget two-man show with musical elements, *TMAS* may be regarded as a variation of the typical festival work that provides light entertainment and ‘laughs’ to a festival audience intent on having ‘fun’. However, there is a further sense in which it relates

to the arts festival context, in that it constitutes a 'festive' event, in the sense of being fundamentally social and celebratory. Although it was not specifically created for festival performances, it has largely evolved within this environment^{xiv}, reproducing a similar sense of communal engagement in metropolitan contexts. In the case study of *TMAS* performances I pay some attention to this point, particularly with regards to comments in the literature on the role of festivals in the creation of a sense of community, culture and cultural identity in the post-election context (Hauptfleisch, 2006).

There is some debate about the long-term value of the festival system for theatre in South Africa. While there are those who recognise the importance of festivals for the creation and survival of independent work, there are others who express concern about the implications for the standard of work. This is aside from concerns about the repercussions of the festival system on the long-term sustainability of theatre in South Africa, in the sense that it adds to the "diminution of the metropolitan theatre culture" and a "lack of job security for theatre practitioners in an event-driven theatre circuit" (Hauptfleisch, 2006:184). As Hauptfleisch explains, "... the perception (is) that festivals are huge (and immensely remunerative) bazaars or craft markets, and that they privilege commercial work, public partying, drinking, and free entertainment over the work of serious artists" (Hauptfleisch, 2006:183). The result, critics feel, is declining quality of festival works that bodes ill for the industry as a whole (Hauptfleisch, 2006).

Once again this reveals a perception that commercial imperatives threaten artistic integrity, and this is a perception that I will challenge. With regards to the particular commercial pressures of the festival context, I will argue that *TMAS'* response to an apparent desire for more communal and celebratory forms of performance, has allowed the development of a theatrical style that combines aspects of the Western tradition with a more community-based and participatory African tradition, in a way that speaks strongly to contemporary globalised tastes (Hauptfleisch, 1997 & 2006). Again, commercial pressures contribute less to artistic disintegration than they do to artistic innovation in relation to the social and cultural needs of a particular historical moment.

1.5. Practical realities of post-election theatre production: Summary

Post-election realities of diminished funding for the arts, commercialisation of theatre production and a booming festival circuit provide a practical context for the development of *TMAS* and account for certain features of the work. The comic format, focused on providing entertainment within a festive environment, emerges as an effective response to a particular set of economic and social circumstances. However, in Chapter Four I argue that the manner in which these elements play out in the work also constructs a critical commentary on them, and on the social and cultural conditions from which they arise. In this way, the inevitable grounding of the work in material and historical circumstances does not preclude it from reflecting on these circumstances in a manner that speaks back to their underlying ideologies.

2. Post-struggle concerns: the content of post-election theatre

A point that is frequently raised in discussions on post-election performance is the loss of a clear ideological agenda for theatre in the aftermath of apartheid (Davis, 2003b; Huisamen, T., pers. com., March 17, 2007; Marlow, 2004; Purkey, 2005; Spitzczok von Brisinski, 2003). During the apartheid era theatre production was clearly focused along lines of political allegiance. On the one hand it centred around the eurocentric state-funded theatres, and on the other around the anti-apartheid 'alternative' or 'protest' theatre. It was largely in the latter that a distinctively South African style of theatre emerged, characterised by a focus on collaborative forms of theatre making and performance and a strongly physical performance style, rather than singly authored texts. It developed specifically in relation to clear aims of revealing the absurdities and injustices of the apartheid system and encouraging resistance to it, also through multi-racial association.

While the collapse of the apartheid system signaled the achievement of these goals, it also pointed to the loss of what had been the most pressing subject matter and function of theatre (Hauptfleisch, 2006). Having developed in relation to resistance to a particular enemy, the demise of this enemy raised questions about what it would now become: what concerns and struggles would define it? (Uwah, 2004). Shortly before the first democratic elections Robert Greig suggested that South African theatre would need to find 'new enemies' in order to remain vital (in Flockemann, 2001:25). Almost a decade and a half after the collapse of institutional apartheid, the initial questions regarding a new focus for South African theatre

have not been entirely resolved, in so far as it may be argued that South African theatre is still in the process of redefining itself and its function within the new dispensation.

However, these issues have been addressed in a number of ways.

2.1. 'Light' entertainment

As suggested in section 1.3., post-election theatre is often characterised by an apparent lack of political or social involvement, and an emphasis on relatively superficial and undemanding 'amusement'. Generally this takes the form of large-scale spectacles (often musicals) such as *The Lion King* (2007), or smaller-scale comedies such as Shirley Kirchmann's *Train Your Man* (2005), and Aaron McIlroy's *D.O.F* (2006). Released from political service, post-election theatre has increasingly served an apparent desire for diversion. It has helped to draw focus away from areas of discomfort, including: painful realities of the present and the past, uncertainty about the future, and I would suggest, the unsettling ambiguity of 'good' and 'bad' in the post-election context. Whereas in the apartheid context 'good' and 'bad' could be clearly assigned – depending on one's allegiance – to those who did or did not support the state, it has become more difficult to distinguish 'right' from 'wrong' – and lines of allegiance – in contemporary South Africa. While the preference for escapist entertainment may be vulnerable to self-serving commercial interest, it may also be viewed as a new function for theatre, that is, to provide distraction or relief from challenging experiences. *TMAS* would at first glance seem to exemplify this response.

2.2. Artistic exploration

The release from political engagement and the need to be 'relevant' has also allowed practitioners to engage in artistic exploration and innovation for its own sake (Buckland, J., pers. com., March 28, 2007; Hauptfleisch, 1997; Van Graan, M., pers. com., May 1, 2007). In the English-language industry, and particularly in the work of white graduates who have come of the training programmes of institutions such as The University of Cape Town (UCT) and Rhodes University (RU), this kind of exploration often centres around what I will refer to as the 'French' or 'Lecoq' influence^{sv}. Recent examples of works within this style include Sylvaine Strike's *Coupé* (2006) Yve Pelsler's *Surfacing* (2006) and Dark Laugh Theatre Company's *Dr. Collinger's Funeral Service* (2007). Amongst other things, this is associated with an atmospheric theatricality stemming from detailed attention to the theatrical elements

of lighting, sound, set and costume, an evocative and highly distilled use of images, and strong elements of clowning and pathos (Buckland, D., pers. com., February 4, 2007; Marais, L., pers. com., February 26, 2007). Its minimal aesthetic and its focus on non-verbal communication and clowning also echoes the distinctive South African style epitomized by *Woza Albert* (1983), which I discuss in Chapter Three. However, its aesthetic is less 'raw' or 'poor'. Also, it is aimed at a more exclusive audience and rarely situated in concrete South African contexts or overtly engaged with political or social issues. This is not to say that it is necessarily devoid of such content^{xvi}, but rather that it signals a movement away from direct socio-political involvement.

It must be noted that the 'Lecoq' style constitutes one trend within a post-election concern with artistic exploration. Another is the turn to a highly syncretic theatre, represented prominently in works of Bailey and Yael Farber. What this movement shares with the Lecoq approach, and also with the works of artistically innovative directors such as Foot-Newton and Marthinus Basson, is a strong use of physical imagery as a theatrical language. In Chapter Three I consider theatrical syncretism in greater detail.

The sense emerging is that of a twofold response to the loss of anti-apartheid theatre: a move to (1) 'light' theatre for entertainment's sake, and (2) 'artistic' theatre, for the sake of artistic exploration and innovation. Both may be interpreted as indicating new functions or purposes for South African theatre. However, they give little indication of specific themes that recur in contemporary works. The following sections attempt to do this.

2.3. Interactions with the past

The suggestion that apartheid has left a void in terms of pressing social or political issues is not uncontested (Flockemann, 2001; Van Graan, M., pers. com., May 1, 2007).

Flockemann's (2001) response to Greig's claim that theatre needs new enemies is: "with a history like ours ... who needs enemies?" (2001:25). Indeed the past has been an important focus of post-election theatre-makers, albeit mainly outside the parameters of mainstream popular theatre. Some of the most prominent post-election confrontations with the past have emerged in works dealing with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (which is briefly discussed in Chapter Three), such as *The story I am about to tell* (1997) and *Nothing but the truth* (2002). Other works that have involved interactions with the past include Andrew and

Janet Buckland's *Makana* (2001) and *Kiss my boot* (2006), which deal with aspects of colonial history.

2.4. *Engagement with social issues*

A second concern of contemporary theatre is the wide spectrum of social problems that were neglected within the overarching focus on apartheid. Fatima Dike somewhat wryly comments: "now, since the struggle is over, we have gone back to the basics [laughing]" (in Solberg, 2003:79). Prominent issues include HIV/AIDS, poverty, crime and violence against women and children (Dike in Solberg, 2003; Hauptfleisch in Solberg, 2003; Marais, L., pers. com., February 26, 2007)^{xvii}. With a number of notable exceptions, such as Lara Foot-Newton's *Tshepang* (2003) and *Reach* (2007), and the gritty urban dramas of Paul Mpumelelo Grootboom (*Not with my gun* – in conjunction with Aubrey Sekhabi (1998); *Relativity: Township Stories* (2005)), these issues are mainly addressed in the context of so-called 'community theatre', which generally falls outside the bounds of so-called 'cutting-edge' or commercially viable theatre (Buckland, J., pers. com., March 28, 2007).

2.5. *Excavations of personal and marginal experience*

In the same way that a range of social issues were eclipsed in the struggle era by the prominent concern with apartheid, individual and social difference was overlooked within the primary pro- or anti-apartheid allegiances. In the post-election context, questions of difference, and of specific personal and social experiences, have come to the fore (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003). As a result, a plethora of post-election works explore personal experiences as well as the experience of marginal social groups such as gays, women, and racially-constructed communities like 'coloureds' and 'Indians' who have been neglected by a primary focus on the categories of 'black' and 'white'. So for example Haike Frank (2004) considers theatrical engagement with issues of coloured identity in Lueen Conning's *A Coloured Place* (1996). She looks at the way in which this identity is delivered from common connotations of 'bastardization' and marginality, and reconstructed in positive terms as a forerunner of a hybrid new South African identity. Thomas Blom Hansen (2005) looks at the function of comic performances within the Indian community with regards experiences of dislocation in post-election South Africa, particularly around ambivalent attitudes to past repression and contemporary modernization.

2.6. Political concerns

A number of contemporary South African productions have dealt with political issues of the post-election context. However, this engagement has not nearly approximated the proliferation or intensity of the political theatre of the struggle period. Issues of corruption and failed service delivery are frequently addressed in a fairly superficial fashion in relatively light 'commercial' satires (for example *Black Mamba* (2005)), while the ironies and complexities of political realities are dealt with in a more probing manner in new texts. Mike Van Graan, whose work (such as *Green Man Flashing* (2003), *Hostile Takeover* (2004), *Some Mothers' Sons* (2006) and *Mixed Metaphors* (2006)) are some examples of the latter, bemoans the fact that more contemporary South African productions are not dealing with political realities (Van Graan, M., pers. com., May 1, 2007).

2.7. Transformation

The above points indicate concerns that have come to the fore in post-election theatre – despite trends of avoiding relevant current issues. However, one of the most central concerns that has emerged in more or less overt and deliberate forms in post-1994 theatre-making is that of social and cultural transformation. This has also been an important focus of post-election criticism. Flockemann writes at the turn of the century: "... South African cultural production is under the spotlight ... with local and international scholars attempting to gauge if and how the processes of transformation are – or could be – manifesting themselves in aspects of performance" (Flockemann, 2001:28). This has included a concern with the way in which performance has *reflected* social and cultural shifts, as well as the way in which it has, like in the apartheid era, *precipitated* or *participated* in them (Hauptfleisch, 2006). Chapter Three examines dimensions of post-election engagement with transformation, which further delineate themes for analysis.

3. The post-election performance context: Summary

This chapter has examined broad trends of theatrical response to changes in the practical conditions of post-election theatre making, and to changes in the South African socio-

political environment. While a number of prominent themes of post-election theatre have been identified, relating notably to history, society and personal or marginal experience, it seems that this theatre's engagement with its context is often functional, rather than thematic. In other words, it is the *process* that it engages within a specific social context – whether it be one of diversion, creative exploration or transformation – that is of primary significance within this context, as opposed to the specific *content* that it deals with. The following chapter explores the transformational function of post-election theatre, building towards the argument that *TMAS* successfully straddles functions of entertainment and transformation. In this way it interfaces with contemporary processes of social and cultural transformation in a way that is specific and suited to its time and to a particular set of South African and global influences.

Chapter Three: Processes of social and cultural transformation and performance in the post-election context

4. Introduction: Transformation and performance in post-election South Africa

The previous chapter suggests that social and cultural processes of transformation have been a prominent focus of post-election performance. This chapter suggests two major aspects of this process: (1) coming to terms with the trauma of the past, and (2) redefining identities in the new context. The primary interest of this research is the manner in which *TMAS* interacts with these processes of transformation. To prepare the ground for this exploration, the current chapter explores the relationship between performance and social and cultural transformation, in particular considering ways in which this has played out in the post-election South African context.

My understanding, and the understanding that emerges from the literature, is that performance not only reflects social and cultural change, but also participates in it and at times even prompts it. Flockemann writes:

While in the past the emphasis has been on the ways in which theatre “reflected” or served as a barometer of ideological and socio-political shifts, in the post-election period the emphasis seems more appropriately placed on the way performance events themselves foreground processes of transformation (Flockemann, 2001:28).

The most obvious way in which performance (and the arts in general) can impact on society is by changing the perspectives of individual social agents. In this way, the conscientising function of theatre was brought into play during the anti-apartheid struggle to raise awareness about the injustice of the system (Hauptfleisch, 1997). In the contemporary context it has been accessed again in works that directly address social and political issues. However, it does not feature strongly in this discussion, as I am more interested in less overt approaches to transformation, which have been prominent in the post-election context. Significantly, a similar interest is reflected in the critical literature (Blom Hansen, 2005; Flockemann, 2001; Frank, 2004; Halligey, 2005).

A more subtle process of interaction between performance and reality, and one that is unmediated by conscious thought or reason, is conceptualised in the broadly conceived

Cultural Studies paradigm, which proposes a particular view of the intimacy of social reality and representation, and performance in particular. I will outline a number of tenets of this view, as they underpin much of the critical research and provide the conceptual framework for this research.

5. Liminality: Between reality and representation

The current study is rooted in a theoretical framework that is associated with Cultural Studies and the related fields of post-structuralism, post-modernism, post-colonialism and social constructionism, which Cultural Studies draws on. All of these approaches posit a constitutive relationship between concrete events and representations of these events. In other words, they assume that representations are not mere reflections of concrete realities, but participate directly in the construction of these realities (Barker, 2000; Barker & Galasinski, 2001; Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2002; Sardar & Van Loon, 1999).

A strong version of this approach denies the existence of any concrete events or realities outside the representations that construct them, thus rendering the concept of 'reality' fundamentally redundant. The more moderate view, which is assumed in this study, posits that reality is 'produced' by representation in the sense that (1) we are not able to perceive concrete events or realities outside of our representations of them, and (2) we structure the world we live in, our lives, our experience and our sense of self in terms of the representations that we hold. While this more moderate view sets limits to the "territorial claim of the discursive", it acknowledges that "how things are represented and the 'machineries' and regimes of representation in a culture do play a *constitutive*, and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role" (Hall, 1995:224).

In this research I often use the term 'discourse' to denote what I refer to above as 'representation', assuming the understanding held within the Cultural Studies framework that discourse may refer to representation in general, or to a particular body of representation. The latter use, which relates in large part to the work of Michel Foucault, extends beyond verbal representation to social practices and to non-verbal 'texts' such as visual images, and is concerned with the way in which discourse structures society, particularly through reproducing power relations and patterns of domination (Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2002; Fairclough, 2003).

Following these terms, the aim of this study is to read a particular performance, which incorporates language as well as action, social interaction, sound and image, as a *discursive text*, and to bring this text in relation to discourses of the broader social context. In terms of the approach outlined here, the understanding is that – as a discursive text – this performance participates in the construction of social reality. Furthermore, by shifting or unsettling dominant discourses that participate in existing constructions of social reality, it may impact upon this reality.

Furthermore, it may be argued that the specific character of the performance text, which is particularly revealing of the intimacy of discourse and embodied social reality, situates it uniquely to facilitate transformation. The dual nature of performance as both representation and concrete event – or ‘reality’ – is suggested through the double meaning of the term, which means to ‘enact’ or ‘impersonate’, as well as to ‘act’, in the sense of ‘doing’ something (Connor, 1996). By highlighting the sense in which discourse and reality are inextricable, performance exposes the manner in which apparently fixed realities are constructed. Also, by momentarily dissolving the apparent intractability of discursive constructions of reality, it can open a space in which it is possible to reflect critically on established constellations of discourse and reality and shift them. That is, it can both undermine existing discursive constructions and provide a context for experimentation with alternative constructions that may or may not eventually be absorbed into a more enduring social reality.

In this regard, it is useful to consider the manner in which Flockemann (2001) conceptualises the participation of performance in processes of social and cultural transformation. Importantly, she locates the transformational potential of performance in the ‘liminal’ zone between concrete experience and invention. Notions of liminality recur within performance studies, and specifically in investigations of the relationship between performance and its contexts. In the post-election context it has been invoked in order to understand interactions between society, culture and performance within a transformational period. In this chapter I outline a number of conceptualisations of the liminality of performance that are relevant to this research. However, at this point my concern is the manner in which ‘liminality’ is invoked in the literature to describe the double nature of performance, as I have suggested, as a ‘discourse’ and an immediate ‘reality’.

Performance theorists such as André Lepecki (2004), Josette Féral (2003) and Chantal Pontbriand (1982) base their distinction of 'performance' and 'theatre', on the difference between (discursive) 'representation' and (immediate) 'presentation'. Whereas theatre represents a different time, place and set of characters, performance presents an immediate reality. It "presents; it does not represent" (Féral, 2003:324). However, as Lepecki (2004) suggests, performance is also always liminal in the sense that it is always both a representation and presentation. It is always 'in-between' the immediate moment and reference to another moment. It is in-between that which *is*, that is, real, embodied and present, and that which *could be*, that is, represented and imagined (Jamal, 2003; Flockemann, Fransman, Tini & Ticha, 2005; Flockemann, 2001). In the space between what *is* and what *could be* new possibilities may be generated which may be more or less consciously absorbed into broader patterns of social life. In addition, in so far as this space reveals the construction of reality and therefore highlights the fact that conventional constructions of reality are not a given, it also opens up the possibility of criticizing these constructions. In the rest of this chapter I consider other conceptions of performative liminality that similarly realise the creative and subversive potential of performance.

However, at this point it should be noted that the argument presented so far is complicated by a second understanding within performance studies, which is that 'immediate' social action is in a way always 'performed', in the sense that it involves a representational process of 'enacting' or 'impersonation' (Fairclough, 2003; Turner, 1982). On the one hand this suggests a particular view of human behaviour, which posits a form of emulation or 'role play' at the root of all action and interaction (Turner, 1982). It proposes that no action is unmediated by discursive constructions of what is real, possible and desirable. On the other hand it suggests an understanding that social action, like performance, is constructed for an audience and within an awareness of being observed. This links with a performance theory understanding that Hauptfleisch (2006) cites, which is that the basic requirement for performance is the presence of performers before onlookers. In this view any situation where one person observes another, constitutes performance.

This view proposes a broad notion of performance, which takes place on a continuum ranging from everyday events to theatrically framed performance events (Schechner, 1977). It suggests that no social action is 'natural' or self-contained, but rather it always signifies

something beyond itself. The manner in which it signifies, and how this corresponds with structures of signification within theatrical performance, is in itself a huge field of study that is engaged within performance studies as well as psychological and sociological approaches^{xviii}. What is relevant here is the fact that this constitutes a further sense in which the distinction between 'reality' and 'representation' becomes blurred in the context of performance. That is, it reveals the intimacy of performance as representational act and performance as immediate social reality. Hence Flockemann cites Marvin Carlson's argument that performance involves an awareness "of the constructedness of much human activity" (Flockemann *et al*, 2005:193). In this view performance – in the widest sense – becomes particularly revealing of the fundamental entwining of representation and reality. Theatrical performance in particular – which is removed from everyday social behaviour – becomes a domain in which there is unusual freedom to experiment with and undermine constructions of the social world. Furthermore, in so far as everyday realities are also performed, they are fluid and open to the influence of such explorations.

In this view rituals and ceremonies become particularly interesting, in the sense that they are social events that highlight the performative construction of social life and of personal and collective experiences. Firstly, such events are social occasions that are clearly structured as performances. Secondly, as performances, they are framed and function to facilitate personal and collective experiences of transition or transformation (Schechner, 1977). In this regard they are rooted in our symbolic experience of the world that allows us to experience symbolic (that is, performed) acts as 'real'. In this way, a symbolic act or performance of integration for example, experientially achieves actual integration (Brooke, 1991). Such events thus demonstrate the Cultural Studies understanding that our perception of reality is fundamentally mediated by our representations of reality.

Hauptfleisch (2006) considers the manner in which significant social events – like rituals and ceremonies – may be structured as performances. However, he also suggests the converse: that theatrical performances may be framed as significant social events (Hauptfleisch, 2006). He uses the term 'eventify' to describe this framing (2006:198). In this view an 'eventified' performance is one that is experienced as being socially significant, for example in the sense that it provides a collective experience of transition or transformation. Hauptfleisch is particularly interested in the manner in which contemporary South African festivals may be viewed as performances in their own right, which obtain social significance in relation to the

ideologies or values that they highlight. He makes an example of the annual Van Der Stel festival in Stellenbosch, which has become 'eventified' as a performance of reconciliation. In Chapter Four I argue that *TMAS* may be regarded as an 'eventified' performance that constructs a particular sense of a social collective within the contemporary South African context. In this manner it interacts with prominent discourses of social transformation, which also highlight experiences of community.

The transformational potential of performative events and 'eventified' performances has been harnessed extensively in post-election South Africa. Repeatedly, events and performances have been constructed in order to facilitate collective experiences of transformation. Particularly, they have served transformational processes of reconciliation and unification. Flockemann refers to the "staging" of post-election transformation in political and sports events, as well as the processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Flockemann, 2001:28). The latter in particular has been an important focus of critical attention.

The TRC was constructed as part of the broader process of post-election rehabilitation and transformation. It presented a public forum at which perpetrators of apartheid crimes could give testimony of their actions in exchange for amnesty. Victims and relatives of victims could also describe their experiences, and confront their perpetrators. The intention was to provide a context in which the trauma of the past could be integrated, both personally, in cathartic acts of public testimony, and collectively, in the reconstruction of narratives of South African history. Furthermore, it focused on integrating a divided South African society by encouraging the reconciliation of perpetrators and victims, and by extension, of the former oppressors and oppressed. Considerable scholarly attention has been devoted to the performative construction of the TRC, as well as the extent to which it did, or did not, achieve what it set out to do (Cole, 2004; Hlongwane, 2006). Furthermore, scholars have also considered theatrical performances that have dealt with the TRC process. Notable examples of works that have taken it as point of departure include *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997), *The Dead Wait* (1997), *The Story I am about to tell* (1997), *Nothing but the truth* (2002), *Molara* (2004), and most recently, *Truth in Translation* (2006). These works have constituted some of the most prominent theatrical engagements with the South African past in a society and an industry that, as I have suggested, are often characterised by a pervasive loss of memory (Davis, 1999; Davis, 2003b; Flockemann in Solberg, 2003;

Hauptfleisch, 1997; Hlongwane, 2006; Kornhaber, 2004; Mda, 2002; Rudakoff, 2004; Van Graan, M., pers. com., May 1, 2007; Solberg, 2003).

At a later point in this discussion I consider another aspect of the broader initiative to rehabilitate and transform South African society, which concerns the construction of a unified society, particularly via a sense of nationhood. I argue that the notions of reconciliation and social integration that permeated the TRC process also play out prominently within this endeavour. A major focus of this research is the manner in which *TMAS* relates to this broadly conceived project of nation building.

In preparation for discussing this process of identity construction, it is useful to note that the notion of 'identity' features prominently within the theoretical paradigm discussed here, and specifically within its conceptualisations of the intimacy of (1) representation and reality, and (2) performance and social reality. Within this view, 'identity' is particularly revealing of the performative construction of reality, as well as the manner in which performances may shift constructions of reality. I will consider how this plays out.

Notions of personal and social identity recur within the explorations of the discursive construction of reality that permeate Cultural Studies and related fields. Following the more moderate view that is espoused here, identity is a prominent example of a textual construction – “an effect of discourse, constructed in discourse” (Fairclough, 2003:160). However, it is also commonly experienced as a concrete reality, in the sense of being an innate and stable 'essence'. To some extent because it is experienced as such, it comes to have concrete effects in the world (that is, it is inscribed on the body and enacted in practical and social contexts), which further confirms the perception that it denotes a distinct, enduring 'entity'. For this reason, the notion of 'identity' provides a useful illustration of the manner in which 'reality' is constructed in discourse, as well as the manner in which constructed realities are mistaken for innate or essential realities.

Importantly, notions of 'performance' are also invoked within Cultural Studies to describe the discursive construction of identities. This reflects the view that the performed nature of social action relates in part to the fact that social identities are performed. As Hauptfleisch (1997) points out, the notion of individuals 'performing' in everyday life and the prominence of role-play in social life encompasses a large area of study. As such, it falls outside the

parameters of this discussion. The important point here is that, like much contemporary South African theatre scholarship, this research accepts its basic tenet that – rather than being an innate reality that is given concrete expression in social life – identity is played out as an actor performs a part, and rehearsed as an actor rehearses a role (Goffman, 1969).

Following from this, theatrical performance, which broadens the scope of possible and permissible ways of being, and allows experimentation with a range of such possibilities, can provide a rehearsal ground for new identities. Specifically, the notion of the ‘liminality’ of performance, as both ‘reality’ and ‘representation’, is invoked to conceptualise the manner in which it can facilitate shifts in identity.

Flockemann (2001) considers the way in which performance can facilitate identity transformation, in view of its liminality. She refers to Carlson’s argument that it is the physicality of performance combined with the manner in which it draws attention to its “liminoid nature” as a constructed event, that makes it a particularly “efficacious procedure” for an “endlessly fascinating process of cultural and personal self-reflexion and experimentation” (in Flockemann, 2001:28). In other words, performance allows for exploration of alternative identities because it simultaneously (1) evokes them in a way that is concrete and thus clearly available for physical enactment, and (2) exposes the common illusion that settled identities are concretely fixed. I understand that this applies to performers in the sense that they are concretely engaged in testing identities. However, I am more interested in how it applies to spectators, who, in my understanding of the process that Flockemann and Carlson describe, are able to experiment with alternative ways of being through their identification with performers as well as their direct experience of the performance event.

One concern of this research is the potential of the embodied yet clearly constructed experience that *TMAS* creates to shift systems of identification and thereby facilitate a transformational process for spectators. In this regard, Flockemann’s understanding of a “‘grounded’ aesthetic” of transformation is useful (2001:26). It describes one way in which individuals may use performance to renegotiate identities. Specifically, it considers the way in which individuals concretely employ the representations of performance in the construction of their living environments and social practices, which is intimately wound up with personal and cultural identity. Significantly, Flockemann points out that this is often

visible in popular and youth culture. Chapter Four makes use of the notion of a grounded aesthetic in order to reflect on the manner in which aspects of *TMAS* have been absorbed within the popular youth culture of middle class South Africans, thereby participating in the construction of their cultural identity.

Part of what this research considers is how post-election South African performance, including *TMAS*, has provided a space to explore alternative constructions of reality, and specifically also constructions of identity. However, it is also interested in the manner in which the potential that performance holds in this regard has been employed in a broader South African context, in officially implemented processes of social and cultural transformation. Out of this stems the major focus of the research, which concerns *TMAS*' interaction with these processes. Specifically, it considers the manner in which *TMAS* interacts – both creatively and subversively – with the prominent post-election initiative to promote a unified South African society. Chapter Four proposes that while *TMAS* subverts this initiative, it also participates in similar transformational processes, relating to the construction of hybrid South African identities, and of experiences of community. Therefore, the next section introduces this initiative, considering how it has played out in contemporary performances – both theatrical, and ‘performances’ of public events and media representations.

Importantly, the concept of ‘liminality’ features prominently in the argument that is built in Chapter Four, as I argue that it is central to *TMAS*' creative and subversive function. Therefore in the remainder of this chapter I also consider further forms of liminality that have been associated with performative interactions with post-election transformation.

6. Social and cultural unification in post-election South Africa

The rehabilitation of South African society in the wake of institutional apartheid has centred prominently on processes of integration that aim at countering the country's legacy of segregation. Extended colonial rule rigidified a particular range of divisions within the society that were formalised, particularly along racial lines, by apartheid. While the political dismantling of this system has removed the legal basis for segregation, its effects continue to be felt in terms of living areas and interpersonal association and economic privilege (Atkinson & Buhlungu, 2007). As visiting dramaturge Judith Rudakoff points out,

“(d)espite the fact that the social constructs are configured differently, barriers are still very much in evidence”. Specifically she remarks that “...economic inequity between the races continues...” (2004:127). Because of the differential distribution of resources to race groups during colonial and apartheid history, economic inequality has been written onto social division and in large part sustains it (Solberg, 2003; Southall, 2007). It is therefore not surprising that South African society continues to demonstrate a high level of racial awareness and prejudice (Butler, 2007; Desai & Nabbi, 2007; Krüger, 2007; Solberg, 2003; Vahed, 2004; Van Graan, 2004b).

Given the centrality of division within South African society, its reconstruction has involved numerous strategies for social integration. These have centred on the traditionally salient category of race, but ethnic, linguistic, and gender divisions have also been addressed. My interest is the way in which processes of integration have played out in contemporary South African performance. At the most basic level this relates to the practical integration of the theatre industry and its audiences. This has been officially promoted via funding agendas that prioritize equal representation. As argued in Chapter Two, works that represent social diversity are better supported by funders in the post-election context. Due at least in part to this, multi-racial casts and issues of intercultural encounter feature prominently on the contemporary circuit (Frank, 2004). However, segregation remains prominent within the broader system of theatrical production. For example, there has been little change in the demographics of theatre audiences, who continue to be mainly wealthy and white (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003; Rudakoff, 2004). Rudakoff (2004) points out more subtle forms of racial division in the theatre industry, for example relating to differing attitudes to history. These are considerations that I return to in the analysis of *TMAS*, which continues to play largely to white audiences and speak to this experience. Suffice it to point out here, as long as the economic realities of poverty and inequality persist, it will be difficult to develop a broader base for theatre and to address the levels of segregation that run through it within the contemporary context (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003). However, at this point I am more interested in the manner in which unification has been promoted through performances of an integrated South African society and culture. This relates to the major post-election endeavour to construct a so-called ‘rainbow nation’.

6.1. Nation building and 'rainbow nation' discourse

As I have suggested, post-election strategies for social and cultural integration have focused on forging a sense of social and cultural unity within South Africa. As Hauptfleisch writes: "As South Africa emerged in 1990 from the trauma of enforced racial and cultural fragmentation brought about successively by British rule and the apartheid regime, it consciously set about ... seeking a sense of cultural unity" (2006:181). In the post-election context, the construction of such a sense has hinged on the notion of a unified South African 'nation'. To this end, notions of nationhood have been actively promoted in post-election South African society.

The active promotion of notions of nationhood by key players in the transformation process has perhaps been one of the major factors in South Africa's achievement of a relatively bloodless revolution^{xix} (Solberg, 2003; Vandenbroucke, 2003). Politically the discourse of "new nationalism" (Naidu, 2001:112) corresponds with the nationalizing programme (or so-called 'post-apartheid project') of the ANC government since it came to power in 1994, and it construes the South African nation as a harmonious unity of diverse cultures, with a triumphant history and a prosperous future (Chapman, 1998; Hlongwane, 2006; Naidu, 2001; Vahed, 2001). It has also been associated with Thabo's Mbeki's modernizing project and his "ambitious forecast of a new dawn for South Africa, an 'African Renaissance'" (Solberg, 2003:2), which posits a flourishing future for South Africa and for Africa as a whole (Hauptfleisch, 2006).

Following Desmond Tutu's reference to the 'rainbow nation' (Solberg, 2003:2) as well as Nelson Mandela's later inaugural reference to South Africa as "a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world" (11 May 1994, in Naidu, 2001:117)^{xx}, the construct of unity within diversity has come to be commonly associated with this image. Since the advent of democracy, stakeholders in transformation have actively promoted this image, and its common employment within the media, advertising and tourism is testimony to its prominence within current cultural frames of reference^{xxi} (Hauptfleisch, 2006; Naidu, 2001; Van Graan, 2006a).

However, the concept is not uncontested and questions are raised about its veracity and usefulness (Chipkin & Jamal quoted in book review by Krueger, 2007^{xxii}; Gunner, 1994;

Hauptfleisch, 2006; Van Graan, 2004b; Van Graan, 2006a; Van Graan, M., pers. com., May 1, 2007). As Chapter Four examines the manner in which *TMAS* interfaces with this discourse, I devote some attention to problematic aspects of its main components below.

6.1.1. Diversity

The notion of 'diversity' is central to rainbow nation discourse in so far as it posits the unity of a range of cultures and groups of 'colour'. Importantly, this notion speaks of differences, but not differences that would threaten an overriding unity. Particularly marked in representations of the rainbow nation circulated for purposes of tourism and advertising, are depictions of cultural diversity reduced to superficial representations of difference that fail to do justice to the richness or complexity of cultures, or to the real material differences in people's lives. Such depictions also reinforce a South African propensity for stereotypes, particularly racial.

This point resonates with a critique within Cultural Studies of a 'multiculturalist' discourse, which uses "uncritical" and "superficial" representations of culture to "describe(s) diverse races living in pluralistic harmony" (Sardar & Van Loon, 1999:123). The 'exoticised' images of this discourse construct cultural difference in terms of deviance from an implicit Western 'norm', thereby mostly perpetuating patronizing discourses of Western (colonial) superiority and power (Sardar & Van Loon, 1999). By reducing 'difference' to features that conform to Western notions of glamour and to divergence from a supposed universal standard, real difference is effectively erased, and the proposed end of celebrating diversity is defeated. In a similar way, constructions of difference within rainbow nation discourse are often naïve, partial and patronizing ones that undermine its aim to support diversity.

In addition, the rainbow nation is often associated with an imagined 'African' identity, construed in clichéd and essentialised terms that poorly reflect the complexity and diversity of African societies, as well as their varying adaptations to colonial rule and globalization. Furthermore, the implication that sometimes emerges from such depictions that it is more 'African' to be 'black', is highly problematic within the racially diverse context of contemporary South African society (Krouse, 2007; Chipkin quoted in book review by Krueger, 2007; Solberg, 2003).

6.1.2. Unity

Rainbow nation discourse formulates a response to issues of division and conflict in South African experience, by positing an integration of formerly divided and conflicting elements. However, this construction of unity is problematic in a number of ways.

Firstly, Hauptfleisch's question – "Is there such a thing as a (single) rainbow culture?" – states a major reservation regarding rainbow nation discourse and its claim to "one-culture-for-all" (Hauptfleisch, 2006:195). A similar reservation may be articulated with regards to the notion of a singular South African identity (Chipkin & Jamal quoted in book review by Krueger, 2007). Given the level of linguistic, regional and cultural difference in South African society, as well as the recent divisive past, it is simply not clear what the basis of this claim is. The idea of the 'nation', which is invoked in rainbow nation discourse to secure notions of unity, is in itself problematic (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1995; Hauptfleisch, 1996). The common understanding within post-colonial and Cultural Studies is that "there is no "scientific" means of establishing what all nations have in common" (Seton-Watson in Brennan, 1995:170) and that the nation must therefore be regarded as a mythical construct – in Benedict Anderson's terms – an 'imagined community' (in Brennan, 1995:172).

This is particularly evident in former settler colonies, such as South Africa, in which the absence of cultural homogeneity highlights the arbitrariness of notions of nationhood. Ashcroft *et al* state: "Settler colony cultures have never been able to construct simple concepts of the nation, such as those based on linguistic communality or racial or religious homogeneity. Faced with their 'mosaic' reality, they have, in many ways, been clear examples of the constructedness of nations" (1995:151-2). In this view the proposal of a unified nation within rainbow nation discourse is more indicative of a strained, ideological attempt to ignore the fractured nature of South African society than it is of any real condition of unity.

However, an objection to rainbow nation discourse that is more significant to this research concerns the manner in which it frequently constructs 'unity' within the context of warm collective experience. This reflects its attempts to foster social healing through a sense of reconciliation and collective transcendence of difficult realities. To this end, it constructs

representations and events that highlight amiable 'togetherness', particularly also in relation to positive feelings, such as triumph, pride and hope, about South Africa's past, present and future. However, the images of South African history and society employed within such representations and events often fail to do justice to the level of suffering and segregation that has characterised – and continues to characterize – South African life (Hauptfleisch, 2006, Hlongwane, 2006). Amongst the challenges of post-election society that are not acknowledged within constructions of convivial community, is the HIV/AIDS pandemic, widespread poverty and unemployment, rampant crime, violence and abuse, and a culture of self-interest, entitlement and corruption (Nattrass, 2007; Southall, 2007; Vetten, 2007). Furthermore, segregation and inequality continue to be prominent features of South African life. While racial and cultural segregation have been managed in the new dispensation, they have not been resolved (Butler, 2007). In addition, the developmental approach of the new government, which has prioritised economic development over the redistribution of resources and social support, has affected a shift from "... a racially-polarised to an increasingly class-divided society" (Southall, 2007:21) that is characterised by an increasingly wealthy black middle class and a widening gap between the rich and poor. Therefore, new forms of division have been added to entrenched ones. Any representation of easy unity within South African society fails to recognise these realities.

This is the thrust of Gugu Hlongwane's attack on what she views as the "prematurely celebratory language of reconciliation" (2006:1). Hlongwane argues:

Terms like "new South Africa" and "rainbow nation" ... not only ignore the "morbid" aspects of South Africa's bloody road to democracy, but also inaccurately suggest a break with the past. This supposed historical rupture belies the continuities of apartheid (Hlongwane, 2006:1).

To postulate a clear break with the past is not only inaccurate, but precludes a full engagement with history and its manifestation in the present, for example in the extreme level of violence that characterises contemporary South African society. As a result, Hlongwane argues that "a pervasive rhetoric of amnesia permeates the social fabric" of South African life. Furthermore, citing Ernest Renan's claim that "the process of forgetting is 'a crucial factor in the creation of a nation' (11)", she links this directly with the project of nation building (Hlongwane, 2006:1).

While I do not deny the value of instilling a positive attitude to transformation, the danger with rainbow nation discourse is that the challenges of South African reality are submerged in images and rhetoric that discourage penetrating engagement with them, or – as Hlongwane points out – their historical origins. In this way, representations of a somehow already-achieved harmony can preclude attempts to really achieve this, drawing attention away from problematic areas of divergence and conflict. Flockemann makes this point when she references Terry Eagleton's claim that a utopian aesthetic – which presents the unity of diverse elements – also “blocks and mystifies the real political movement towards ... historical community” in the sense of presenting it as already and unproblematically achieved (Eagleton in Flockemann, 2001).

6.2. The 'rainbow nation' in performance

Rainbow nation discourse has been staged in a range of South African contexts, and most extravagantly in the spectacles of political ceremony and sports events. It has been deliberately enacted for socio-political – and, as I will show, commercial – effect to such an extent that it may be argued that its role has become characteristically performative. The prominence of public displays around the theme of the rainbow nation in post-election years indicates that key figures in the transformation process implicitly understand the impact of performance on social life. There are two components to this understanding. On the one hand it suggests that an image of a desirable future may provide a direction for change. This is encapsulated in Flockemann's reference to a 'utopian' aesthetic of transformation, which “reconciles that which is currently divided or fragmented” and can ‘symbolically prefigure’ political transformation and social transition (Flockemann, 2001:30). On the other hand it suggests that the performance is itself a social event that contributes something new to dominant ways in which social reality is constructed. Performance events during the struggle, for example, contributed momentary realities of multi-racial interaction and solidarity to a predominantly segregated and conflicted social reality. In the post-election context, performance events that foreground positive and harmonious multi-cultural encounter have been constructed in the service of a diverse and unified ‘new South Africa’.

As I have suggested, performances of rainbow nation discourse have also increasingly been employed in commercial contexts in order to sell themselves, or a range of products, services and events. Furthermore, in this context the glib positivity of light entertainment, the popular

media and advertising has become conflated with, and heightened, the idealism of rainbow nation discourse. This indicates the construction of rainbow nation discourse within (1) what I have described as a prominent contemporary desire for escapist experience, as well as (2) a globalising (American) commercialised and media-driven culture. Regarding the latter, it echoes this culture's construction of reality within the superficial and glamorised images of the popular media, which often inhabit a kind of a-historical 'perpetual present' (Appignanesi & Garratt, 1995). Within its appropriation by globalising commercial culture, rainbow nation discourse becomes additionally problematic, as it represents the encroachment of its exploitative and deceptive dynamics on South African society.

Rainbow nation discourse is also constructed in contemporary theatrical performance. While certain works promote it strongly, other works interact with it in more complex ways. I will consider this distinction, in the process introducing further forms of 'liminality'.

The clearest employment of rainbow nation discourse is exemplified by works like *African Footprint* (world premier: 2000, May 11) and *Umoja* (premier: 2000), which have seized on the selling power of its emotional appeal (Van Graan, M., personal interview, May 1, 2007). Billed as an expression of the "pride, passion, excitement, laughter and dreams of the people of the new South Africa" (African Footprint: n.d.a.), *African Footprint* has successfully marketed its representations of cultural diversity and national unity in South Africa and abroad. Its "grand meta-narrative of South African ascendance", which assures the "promise of ebullient prosperity", is emblematic of the most naïve versions of rainbow nation discourse (Kornhaber, 2004:5).

A similarly problematic representation occurs in *Umoja*, which – like *African Footprint* – has successfully commodified buoyant images of a generic African identity. Both works deal in essentialised representations of 'African' identity that, as suggested earlier, show little regard for the intricacy of cultures or historic and material difference. Their exploitation of cultural forms for commercial interest, particularly within the paradigm of Western consumption of formerly colonised cultures, is simplistic, misleading, often offensive and, as Kornhaber suggests, "dangerously naïve" (Kornhaber, 2004:6).

Bain's comments on tourist representations appropriately describe the relationship of such works with the ideals of integration and reconciliation that underlie rainbow nation discourse:

(F)ar from stressing interactions and communication, contact and affinity between various spectra of South African society, (they) emphasise and reiterate separation and segregation, highlighting the links between wealth and culture, European heritage and white economic hegemony. The "rainbow nation", in this sense, remains somewhat elusive (Bain, 2003:155).

Chapter Four explores the way in which *TMAS* interacts with this commercial type of 'packaging' of discourses of unity and reconciliation, which has come to saturate South African society not only in performances such as these, but also in the prominently circulated images of the media and advertising.

At this point, however, I am interested in more subtle resonances with rainbow nation discourse that play out in contemporary South African performance. Because of the prevalence of this discourse in South African society, its terms have to some extent been absorbed within popular consciousness. Also, a range of its concerns, such as identity, cultural diversity, integration and reconciliation, are independently prominent in the post-election context. Not only do they constitute important themes of South African experience, but they are deliberately highlighted by policies dictating, for example, distribution of funds. As a result, contemporary works often resonate with aspects of rainbow nation discourse. Examples include Athol Fugard and the cast's *My life* (1994), Farber's *Amajuba: Like Doves we Rise* (2000) and Foot-Newton's *Reach* (2007), all of which present processes of reconciliation, integration and healing within contexts of communal experience and specifically within interactions between individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. Other works such as Andrew Buckland's *Makana* (2001) and *Plunge* (2003), which emphasize ensemble and multi-cultural performances, construct a sense of diversity as well as a strong sense of a collective.

In my analysis a further resonance with rainbow nation discourse occurs in an important movement within South African performance, which focuses on drawing together a range of cultural forms within specific works. In the same way that rainbow nation discourse draws together distinct cultural identities and practices within a singular South African identity or culture, such works attempt to forge together diverse cultural identities and / or practices within a singular performance or performance style. The section that follows introduces a second form of liminality, which describes performances that are located between different

cultural traditions. I go on to examine the extent to which their construction of cultural hybridity mirrors the superficiality of rainbow nation constructions of difference and unity.

7. 'Liminality': 'Between' cultural paradigms

There is considerable interest in the literature in "increasing experimentation with eclectic performance styles and traditions" (Flockemann, 2001:36) in contemporary South African theatre and the attendant "emergence of a distinctive cross-cultural performance paradigm" (Bain, 2003:148). This is variously referenced under the rubrics of 'hybrid', 'syncretic', 'crossover', 'hypertheatrical', 'liminal' and 'total theatre' (Bain, 2003; Coplan, 1985; Flockemann, 2001; Flockemann *et al*, 2005; Hauptfleisch, 1997; Jamal, 2003). The notion of 'syncretic' performance in part reflects a global shift in notions of 'theatre' or 'performance', associated with a typically post-modern interest in fusion and pastiche (Bain, 2003; Hauptfleisch, 1997). However, the term 'syncretic' is derived from post-colonial performance studies, in which it is conceptualised as an active strategy for destabilising colonial constructions of cultural 'others'. In this context it refers to "(t)he process whereby culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together" (Balme, 1999:1). Forms and codes of various cultural traditions are drawn together in a way that destabilises the singular authority of the colonial viewpoint, and in particular its constructions of the colonial 'other'. As Balme argues, "(s)yncretic theatre is one of the most effective means of decolonising the stage, because it utilizes the performance forms of both European and indigenous cultures in a creative recombination of their respective elements, without slavish adherence to one tradition or the other" (1999:2). However, as I shall suggest, it is not clear that syncretic forms that are prominent in South African performance always function to deconstruct hegemonic discourses. For this reason, my use of 'syncretism' here primarily denotes cultural fusion.

7.1. *South African syncretic performance*

Syncretic theatre has found fruitful ground in the culturally diverse South African context. As Bulgarian critic and academic Kalina Stefanova (in Bain, 2003) points out, non-western performance traditions that are largely lost in more developed countries continue to feature in South African life and have therefore been available for integration with more traditionally Eurocentric forms. The result has been a move in post-1970 South Africa to "syncretize and

hybridize various forms of performance, combining 'African', 'European', 'American', 'Eastern', and other styles" in the process creating a "distinctive South African theatre and performance forms" (Hauptfleisch, 1996:182). Most notably, elements of ritual, storytelling, song and dance that characterise indigenous cultural approaches have been brought into relationship with aspects of "classical Western well-made plays" (Bain, 2003:145) as well as the experimental approaches of the Western avant-garde (Bain, 2003; Hauptfleisch, 1997).

In my view, there are three broad categories of syncretic performance in post-election South Africa. The first occurs mainly in music and dance, and focuses on the fusion of a range of cultural performance forms. *African Footprint* is an example of such a work, which illustrates the tendency to exoticise cultural difference that I will suggest is a danger within this approach. Examples that display greater sensitivity to diverse traditions include collaborations between Jazzart Dance Theatre and Magnet Theatre, such as *Medea* (1994) and *Rain in a dead man's footprints* (2004), as well as pieces by Jay Pather and the Siwela Sonke Dance Company, such as *A South African Siddhartha* (1999) and *Home* (2003).

The second category corresponds more specifically with the distinctively South African style (mentioned in Chapter Two) that emerged as an important facet of protest theatre and has at times been equated with 'township theatre' (Buckland, J., pers. com., March 28, 2007; Hauptfleisch, 1997). In its use of song, dance, mime, live music and its emphasis on storytelling and direct address, it draws strongly on African oral traditions of performance. Because of this, and because of its beginnings as 'poor' theatre that often played in non-theatre spaces, it relies strongly on the physical and vocal skill of performers, prioritising "the actors, the story and the audience imagination to create a stage reality" rather than emphasising "physical objects on stage" (Stefanova in Bain, 2003:157). Furthermore, in order to cross language barriers it prioritises physical expression above verbal content. It tends to be light and lively in tone, making prominent use of humour and displaying, as Stefanova suggests, characteristically "unbridled energy and emotion" (Bain, 2003:157). It is often improvisational rather than text-based, valuing more democratic means of theatre making, and setting it apart from the Western literary tradition that prioritises the authorised play text (Bain, 2003; Hauptfleisch, 1997)^{xviii}.

In the contemporary context this style intersects prominently with the paradigm of physical comedy, which similarly emphasises dynamic physical characterisation and humour. It also

overlaps with the typical 'festival work' discussed in the second chapter, which emphasises economy, mobility, comedy, and the versatility of performers (Hauptfleisch in Solberg, 2003).

Woza Albert (collaboration by Percy Mtwa, Mbongeni Ngema and Barney Simon [circa 1981]) is a prominent example of this style from the struggle period, while more recent examples include works of Janet and Andrew Buckland (such as *The Water Juggler* [1998] and *Makana* [2001]), Oscar Petersen and Heinrich Reisenhofer's *Suip!* (1999), Masutsa Dance Theatre Company's *Coal Yard* (2006), André-Jacques van der Merwe's *Struisvogelstories* (circa 2000), and Farber's *Amajuba, Like Doves We Rise* (2000).

The third category draws more strongly on the ritualistic dimension of the participatory African tradition, whilst retaining features of the broader Western paradigm such as concern with theatrical design and with formal experimentation (Buckland, J., pers. com., March 28, 2007). Productions are often darker in tone and less popularly accessible than those of the first category, and they are often aimed at what is regarded as a theatrically sophisticated or 'high-brow' audience.

Prominent examples include works of Bailey, who is known for his concern with ritual and his distinctive and often "irreverent incorporation of syncretic or creolised performance forms" ^{xxiv} (Flockemann *et al*, 2005:196), as well as Farber's *Sezar* (2001) and *Molora* (2004), which employ an African aesthetic and ritualistic forms to deal with strongly political content. To some extent Aubrey Sekhabi's *Newtown / Mother of Rain: Mmapula* (2005) also displays a synthesis of forms and elements of ritual. The latter production was a collaboration between British and South African producers, such international collaboration being a newer feature on the theatrical landscape. Similar examples include *Vuka!Vuka!* (2005) and *The African Choir* (2007).

7.2. South African syncretic performance and rainbow nation discourse

As suggested already, a link may be drawn between the fusion of cultural forms that characterises syncretic theatre, and the processes of cultural fusion that have been central to the rainbow nation project. As Hauptfleisch points out, "(t)he process of syncretization is very much a part of ... the reconciliation processes set in motion by Nelson Mandela –

brilliantly displayed in the boldly multicultural, and crossover concert held at his inauguration as first President of the 'new South Africa' in 1994" (2006:182). The fusion of various traditions in order to create a new performance style that is "original and potentially unique" may be viewed as an analogy of the democratic project of fusing a new South African culture, identity and future (Bain, 2003:146). In this sense the evolution of a hybrid South African performance culture may be viewed as participating in the post-1994 task of "coming to grips with the present and ... shaping the future ... across ... the many chasms that divide people and communities" (Hauptfleisch, 2006:182).

However, there are important differences between representations of the rainbow nation and forms of theatrical syncretism identified in the literature.

I have suggested that the kind of syncretism that is portrayed in rainbow nation discourse is often superficial and fails to do justice to specific cultural systems of representation. In this regard, it corresponds with the 'theatrical exoticism' that Balme contrasts with 'syncretic theatre':

On the superficial level of exterior appearance there seem in fact to be parallels. However, theatrical exoticism ... pays no heed to the original textuality of the elements it appropriates... They are arbitrarily recorded and semanticized in an entirely Western aesthetic and ideological frame... (1999:5).

Syncretic theatre by contrast uses processes of adaptation that "respect the semantics of the cultural texts they use" (Balme, 1999:5). In this sense performances of rainbow nation discourse may be regarded as a debased form of syncretic performance.

The kinds of South African syncretic performance described earlier do not constitute the glaringly nationalistic, 'textbook' display of rainbow nation discourse of works such as *African Footprint* and *Umoja*, yet they may speak to aspects of it. In Balme's terms, they may be closer to 'exoticism' than to 'syncretism'.

In the syncretic South African performance discussed above this danger is perhaps most clearly evident in the first category, which at times represents stereotypical constructions of cultural and racial identities (Greig, 2002, 2003 & 2006). This is partly a function of the style in which performers evoke a range of characters through bold physical and vocal

choices. However, it may also relate to what has been identified as a South African “predilection for “reading for stereotype”” (Driver in Flockemann *et al*, 2005:205). It manifests as a predominance of works that are commonly bracketed as ‘physical comedy’, which present a range of stock South African types to humorous effect. Often they include what may be regarded as token members of each of the major racial and cultural groups, such as ‘the coloured’, ‘the Indian’ and ‘the Afrikaner’. There is considerable variation in the complexity of characterisation within these works, ranging from broad caricature to far more nuanced representations, but there is generally an interest in evoking cultural groupings in familiar and recognisable terms^{xxv}. Furthermore, even when dealing with serious subject matter the overall tone of these works is positive and difference is constructed in a manner that reinforces messages of integration and reconciliation.

To some extent, a work’s affinity with exoticism or syncretism is also a function of how it is read. The Cultural Studies framework acknowledges the construction of meaning in the act of reception, so that the context in which a work is performed is central to its signification (Campbell, 1996; Gunner, 1994). In a context that is saturated with rainbow nation discourse, a range of performances may be read in terms of this discourse, and in this way come to participate in it. The fact that this research attempts to read works, including *TMAS*, in relation to this discourse not only illustrates the Cultural Studies premise, but also indicates its use of a relational reading strategy, in which works are read in relation to other forms of cultural production.

So, rainbow nation representations may be distinguished from representations of cultural diversity that accommodate difference. What is of greater interest here however, is the distinction between rainbow nation discourse and representations that allow for ambivalence of meaning. This is demonstrated by the distinction that Jamal (in Flockemann *et al*, 2005) makes between a ‘reactionary’ syncretism, which limits meaning, and a ‘radical’ syncretism, which opens it.

In this regard it is significant that the solution that rainbow nation discourse offers to the radical multiplicity of South African life consists in neatly packaged images of difference. The risk of such an approach is that it sets up new norms that insidiously impose limitations rather than opening possibilities. In this way, it suppresses difference. In addition, rather than allowing for complex, contradictory or ambivalent conceptions, it narrows meaning to

clearly-defined categories. In terms of Jamal's view, rainbow nation discourse may therefore be regarded as the kind of syncretic form that tends to "rigidify difference", effectively suppressing the "originary heterogeneity" that distinguishes South African experience (in Flockemann *et al*, 2005:203). In addition, as the following extract suggests, by signifying in the realm of familiar and neatly delineated categories, rainbow nation discourse loses its subversive and challenging potential:

[It] is the very forgetting of the eccentric and outcast nature and power of syncretism that has resulted in the withering of its radical and transformative impact. Co-opted by capital and by nationalist rhetoric, evident in glib phrases such as "simunye, we are one" and the "rainbow nation", syncretism has not in fact produced the level of critical inquiry and cultural signification of which it is capable (Jamal in Flockemann *et al*, 2005:203).

In contrast with this reactionary syncretism Jamal posits a radical syncretism, which opens up space for ambivalent meaning. This indicates a quality of syncretism that counters the kind of 'rigidification' of culture and meaning that characterises rainbow nation discourse. It also indicates a third sense in which performance may be 'liminal', reflecting its capacity to construct meaning in-between clear positions. The interest of this research is particularly how *TMAS* employs this form of liminality in order to unsettle discourses, including those of the rainbow nation.

8. 'Liminality': 'between' meanings

It is significant that Balme's (1999) interpretation of syncretism (or hybridity) extends beyond stylistic eclecticism, to an attitude to meaning that is open to multiplicity and contradiction. He considers the work of Homi Bhabha, "who more than any other has defined hybridity as a concept which challenges certain premisses (*sic*) of Western epistemology" (Balme, 1999:12). He points out that Bhabha's understanding of hybridity refers to the concrete experience of multiple identities, but also to "a wider political undertaking which he defines as the possibility of eluding 'the politics of polarity' and recognizing the fundamentally hybrid constitution of self and culture" (Balme, 1999:12).

Jamal's (in Flockemann *et al*, 2005) understanding is similar. Like Balme, he conceives of a syncretism that subverts a central locus of meaning, and thereby unsettles rigid discourse. Unlike 'reactionary syncretism', which "elides radical difference" and suppresses the "originary heterogeneity" of South African experience, Jamal's 'radical syncretism'

(a)cknowledges no *a priori* truth, neither does it post its own truth as the answer. Immanent and interstitial, it is an aesthetic and epistemological strategy that, in challenging authorized beliefs and practices, serves to further destabilize public doxa and received authority (In Flockemann *et al*, 2005:203).

In this way, the 'hybridity' of performance emerges as a feature of representation, rather than a performance style.

In Jamal's (2003a) analysis, the 'hybrid' nature of performance indicates a feature of signification in general, which – in the Cultural Studies view – is not the coherent product of a single textual authority, but is always contextually specific, changing, unstable and contradictory (Jamal, 2003a & 2003b; Kaplan, 1996). In Jamal's analysis, theatre highlights this crisis of representation through its "formal hybridity and its liminal impurity in relation to the other arts, each of which theatre absorbs in order to make itself" (2003:45). Jamal associates this formal hybridity with theatre's duplicity as both a political and an aesthetic event. I would argue that by extension, it is also rooted in its dual nature as concrete reality and representation. In this regard, the liminality of performance in terms of its attitude to meaning is closely linked to its liminality as both reality and representation. Chapter Four illustrates this intimacy, as it frequently points out the manner in which *TMAS*' hybrid construction of meaning relates to the contradictions that are set up between the meanings that it constructs as representation, and those that it constructs as a concrete reality.

The crucial point at this stage, however, is that in Jamal's analysis, theatre "serves as the succinct figuration of a crisis that dogs every art form" (Jamal, 2003:39). Furthermore he holds that the extent to which specific works embrace this quality, is commensurate with their transformative potential, both in terms of subverting established discourses, and in terms of generating new possibilities. In this regard he assumes Loren Kruger's understanding that it is precisely "...theatre's liminal status and agency, its corruptibility as an art form..." that makes it potentially transformative (Jamal, 2003:38). In this way, its apparent weakness is also its "primary source of the strength" and the source of its "emancipatory power" (Jamal, 2003:37 & 40).

In the literature there is some interest in contemporary South African works that employ this form of hybridity / syncretism / liminality in order to break open rigid constructions of

meaning, and construct new possibilities in their place. In particular, Jamal (2003) cites the work of the Junction Avenue Theatre Company, William Kentridge and Brett Bailey. Similarly, Flockemann cites Bailey's work as an example of the kind of performance that is "useful for unsettling given identities or perceptions" and thereby producing the "site of in-betweenness where a new culture can be created" (Flockemann *et al*, 2005:193). Alex Halligey's (2005) analysis of Magnet Theatre's post-election work also notes increasing tolerance for ambivalence, specifically relating to South African cultural identity. In particular, it notes a shift from an immediate post-1994 concern with clear binaries of difference, to a more recent concern with complex and multi-faceted dynamics of difference and integration. By extension it reveals a shift from simplistic constructions of nationhood to engagement with far more intricate and murky processes of cultural formation. Work such as these may be regarded as performances that highlight the "persistent impurity" of theatre and signification in general (Kruger in Jamal, 2003:39).

The notion of theatre's transformational potential in its various forms of liminality recurs in this research, echoing Flockemann's assertion of the "emancipatory space offered by the 'in-betweenness' of certain modes of performance" (Flockemann *et al*, 2005:193). It also reflects an understanding in Cultural Studies, which recognises the transformative potential of spaces in-between. Vasu Reddy discusses the concept of the 'boundary' in this paradigm. In this view, 'boundary zones' demonstrate radical openness and hybridity with regards to the functioning of power and knowledge (Reddy, 2005). The implication is that it is in these zones that rigid constellations of power and knowledge may be destabilised, making space for new possibilities. In the same vein Flockemann mentions the post-colonial interest in "liminal territory, in boundaries and borders", citing Bahktin's observation that "the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries" (in Flockemann *et al*, 2005:193).

Chapter Four explores ways in which *TMAS* constructs boundary zones, and the subversive and transformational potential that this creates. As I have suggested, performance may signify in the boundaries between: (1) 'reality' and 'representation', (2) cultural paradigms, and (3) aspects of signification. This research is concerned primarily with *TMAS*' liminality in the first and last of these senses: as both reality and representation, and as a nexus for ambivalent processes of signification.

This research embraces Jamal's (2003) claim that syncretic performance can simultaneously destabilise rigid formulations of nationhood – such as those that emerge in rainbow nation discourse – and participate in the 'creation of a new culture' or indeed nation. That is, performance has the "double-edged capacity to reinforce the concept of national unity and to de-found this concept..." (Jamal, 2003:42). Furthermore, it is precisely its formal hybridity that allows it to "deconstruct the very conditions for hope that it seeks to sustain" (Jamal, 2003:42). Syncretic performance in particular is well-placed both to undermine the most problematic manifestations of rainbow nation discourse and to participate in its founding aim, that is, to encourage diversity together with integration.

The focus of this research is the way in which the ambivalent relationship that *TMAS* establishes with rainbow nation discourse and its broader project of unity and integration allows it to "expose the contradictions which threaten a projected national unity, while, at the same time, providing a way forward" (Jamal, 2003:45). I argue that *TMAS*' syncretic attitude to meaning allows it to subvert simplistic aspects of rainbow nation discourse, particularly as it has been constructed within globalising entertainment-driven commercialism. However, within the liminal space of signification that it constructs, new possibilities also arise. In this regard the transformational function of the work relates strongly to subversion, but also to simultaneously reconstructing what is being subverted, whether it be commercialism, the paradigm of popular entertainment or importantly, rainbow nation discourse.

9. Redefining cultural identities

Earlier in this chapter I considered the association of performance and identity, reviewing the conception that identities are constructed in performance, so that theatrical performance can participate in shifting them. Specifically, such performance can constitute a rehearsal ground for new identities and can dislodge constructions of identity that are apparently fixed.

Ignatius Ticha, for example, describes the way in which a Bailey work demonstrates how "identities are invented, hybrid, fluid, negotiated and sometimes fixed" (in Flockemann *et al*, 2005:199). There has been considerable critical interest in the post-election context in the way in which performance has reflected and participates in shifts in specific group identities. The following sections consider a number of themes within contemporary theatrical concern with identity, which, as I show in Chapter Four, also play out within *TMAS*.

Chapter Two points out that concerns and identities that were overshadowed by the unified resistance against apartheid have come to the fore in the post-election context. In this process narratives of the collective have often been replaced with narratives of individual experience and attention has been given to marginal experience that was neglected and even suppressed in the struggle context (Fleishman in Solberg, 2003; Purkey, 2005; Rudakoff, 2004). This is associated in the literature with the rehabilitation of the domestic space and the creation of a “home for intimacy” that have featured within post-election South African theatre as “part of a psychic rehabilitation of a fragmented people” (Flockemann, 2001:34).

Although I recognise the importance of reclaiming identities from their construction under apartheid, the danger is that works that focus on such identities reproduce divisions and stereotypes within South African society. That is, they may entrench apartheid divisions and play into the most simplistic categorisations of rainbow nation discourse (Van Graan, M., pers. com., May 1, 2007). Therefore works such as Reisenhofer’s *Joe Barber* series (1999), which focuses on coloured identity, and Rajesh Gopie’s *Out of Bounds* (1999) and *The Coolie Odyssey* (2002), which focus on Indian identity, straddle a fine line between rendering difference in a way that resists claims to an overriding identity, and buying into the categorisations that underpin this singular identity. Once again, the significance that emerges relates to the way in which the work is read. For example, if such works are viewed by those whose experiences they deal with, they may be employed in a process of renegotiating personal identity. However, if they are viewed outside of the communities that they reflect on, their representations may be employed in order to confirm stereotypical views of these groups.

TMAS addresses similar dynamics to those that Frank (2004) and Blom Hansen (2005) describe, but the construction of the performers as white males and the predominantly white constitution of its audiences highlights the relevance of these dynamics to white experience in particular. Interestingly the show has found a sympathetic audience amongst both English and Afrikaans home language speakers. My analysis makes reference to prominent concerns within these groupings, given their respective roles in the history of the country and their reconfiguration in the contemporary context. It reflects, for example, on the Afrikaans community’s concern with redefining itself and ensuring its survival in the new dispensation, particularly in relation to its perceived responsibility for apartheid (Botha. S., pers. com., July 7, 2007; Cairns, J., pers. com., July 13, 2007; Hauptfleisch, 2006; Krog, 2007; Steyn, 2004).



On the other hand, it also reflects on the very different post-election response of the English community, which has been characterised by a denial of cultural specificity or coherence (Foster & Salusbury, 2004). *TMAS* constructs an identity space that reflects on both.

The issue of masculinity is another identity concern that features prominently in the work and resonates with contemporary theatrical and scholarly concerns. Hauptfleisch indicates a contemporary concern with “the ‘unmanning’ of the white male” (2006:187). Other scholars also consider and perform interrogations of masculinity (Barnes, 2005; Akerman quoted in interview by Krueger, 2003; Reddy, 2005). Chapter Four examines the contribution that *TMAS* makes through its characteristically paradoxical engagement with issues of masculine dominance and sexuality.

It must be added that the concern with group identities that I have highlighted here also raises questions about the possibility of describing any singular social identity. In his discussion on engagement with Afrikaans identity in performance Hauptfleisch asks: “Is it a single culture, with distinctive features?” and “can it encompass all points of view and all issues without becoming fractured [?]” (Hauptfleisch, 2006:195). I argue that a further feature of *TMAS*’ engagement with distinct South African identities is that it destabilises any claim to singular or cohesive categories. In this regard it also unbalances rainbow nation discourse, which proposes an overriding national unity, as well as a range of bounded cultural identities. As Hauptfleisch very aptly points out: “...the rainbow cannot exist if the various bands in its spectrum are not secure in their own identity” (Hauptfleisch, 2006:195).

To summarise, *TMAS* engages issues relating to specific identities in the period of post-election transformation. It considers the construction of a hybrid South African society, while also focusing on the reconstruction of particular identities in the post-election period. These include white Afrikaans, English and masculine identities. *TMAS*’ engagement with these areas constructs a comment on contemporary processes of social and cultural transformation and in particular a comment on the construction of a unified nation.

10. Transformation and performance in post-election South Africa: Summary

This chapter considers processes that relate to rehabilitating a traumatised and fractured South African society, and how they have intersected with contemporary South African performance.

The following chapter gives an extended analysis of two *TMAS* performances in order to argue that the work interacts with contemporary South African processes of transformation, along the lines plotted out above. In the process it argues that *TMAS*' interaction with its context reveals the sense in which it is clearly of its time, arising within – but also confronting – the conditions of a transforming and increasingly globalised South Africa.

Chapter Four: A case study of two *TMAS* performances

11. Introduction

The argument of this research is that *TMAS* engages with aspects of contemporary South African society and culture that reflect and subvert prominent discourses of transformation. In this way it both participates in and undermines rainbow nation discourse, and in particular its construction of cultural hybridity and social integration. The present chapter demonstrates this engagement with reference to two performances.

To begin with I make a number of general comments about *TMAS* performances, introducing aspects of the work that feature prominently within the analysis. Specifically, I consider the characters of Corné and Twakkie, who are central to all *TMAS* performances. I also introduce two contrary dynamics that play out in the work. The first is continuity. I argue that the consistency of the characters and the manner in which they have been publicly promoted, constructs them as familiar figures within South African society. This allows the performance to resonate with aspects of this context. The second aspect is contradiction. I show how this plays out in the construction of Corné and Twakkie and their basic relationship with the audience. The notion of contradiction recurs in the course of the chapter, as I look at the manner in which it functions to subvert settled discourses, as well as opening up new possibilities.

In sections 13 and 14 I analyse the specific performances, considering ways in which they interact with aspects of the contemporary South African context.

Section 13 looks at the manner in which the performances participate in the construction of hybrid South African identities, undermining the categories of difference that rainbow nation discourse sets up, but also fulfilling its underlying aim to draw diverse identities together within a hybrid culture.

Section 14 focuses on processes of contradiction. I look at the way in which the performances continually affect shifts and paradoxes that undermine whatever they deal with. Particularly, I consider how they undermine discourses of healing and unity.

Within the relational reading employed in this research, *TMAS* is read in relation to constructions of the rainbow nation that are prominent in contemporary South Africa, specifically in contexts of advertising, the media and popular entertainment. I suggest that within such a reading, *TMAS*' subversion of discourses of healing and unity may be interpreted as subversion of 'rainbow nation discourse'. However, I also consider the manner in which the performances do – in another paradox – achieve some of what rainbow nation discourse intends.

The argument that runs through the analysis is that *TMAS* creates a liminal space, in-between:

1. pairs of opposites constructed through various contradictions
2. 'reality' and 'representation', or the performance as an immediate event, and a fictional construction
3. the audience and the performers
4. typically distinct cultural identities

I propose that it is within this liminal space that the work is able to reflect on aspects of South African society and establish new possibilities of being.

It must be noted that I view the performances as entire events in which the audience participates in the construction of meaning. This includes my own responses and interpretations of the significance of events. It also demonstrates the theoretical assumption that underpins this study, that is, that significance is not constructed by a single textual authority, but emerges in a process that engages a range of elements, both 'central' and 'peripheral'. In this view, meaning is a product of context, and not of artistic intention. This also confirms an understanding of hybrid performance advanced in particular by Jamal (2003a), which roots it in a fractured and collective process of signification.

One of the performances, which I term 'the Baxter show', took place in December 2006 at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. My analysis of this show is based on a digital recording of the performance and a written transcription of this recording. The other performance, which I term 'the Festival show', took place in June and July 2007 at the Grahamstown Festival. Because I was unable to record this show, my analysis in this case is based on written notes.

In order to gather as much as possible data, I watched the performance three times and combined the notes made on these occasions. Although there are differences between the three performances, they follow the same basic structure and individual differences do not contribute significantly to the points that I focus on. Therefore I refer to these performances as one show.

I chose to analyse relatively recent performances, as the impression that I formed in the initial phases of the research is that *TMAS* has developed significantly over the years, becoming more complex, layered and crafted. In contrast with its earlier proximity to stand-up comedy, the work has become increasingly theatrical, demonstrating more fleshed out and resonant characters and themes. Also, many of the dynamics that interest me have only been crystallised in more recent performances. It is therefore important to note that I am describing the work within a particular phase that does not speak for all *TMAS* performances.

Both performances focus on Corné and Twakkie's interactions with the audience as they attempt to entertain and heal them. The main difference is that the Baxter show takes place in a large theatre, while the Festival show takes place in a more informal type of 'theatre bar'. The latter immediately constructs a more relaxed and participatory setting. In addition it takes place in the festival context, which also provides a broader framework of informal, participatory entertainment. In contrast, the Baxter show takes place in a formal theatrical context. As a result, the notion of theatricality is often undermined in this show, as elements of theatrical performance are satirised and its conventional boundaries transgressed.

12. 'Corné' and 'Twakkie': Continuity and contradiction

12.1. Continuity within the South African context

TMAS performances are defined and driven by the characters of Corné and Twakkie and the manner in which they relate to one another and to audiences. Since the inception of the work these characters have been strongly constructed outside of the parameters of set performances, interacting with audiences before and after shows, appearing at public events, and featuring in published interviews and mock journalistic accounts. The television series has substantiated the sense of the characters' location in ongoing South African realities, by detailing aspects of their invented and distinctively South African backgrounds, and depicting them in a range of contemporary contexts.

Thus, particularly within young middle class experience, the characters have been constructed as enduring presences and their identities form part of the spectrum of identities that characterise the South African social sphere. This invests broader social significance in the interactions around identity that happen during performances. The specific dynamics involved will be discussed in the body of the chapter.

The section that follows discusses basic elements of characterisation, as this reflects an important constant in the work. However, it also introduces contradictions that are embedded within the characterisation, as the levels of contradiction that play out in the work form a recurring concern within the analysis.

12.2. Introducing contradiction

This section focuses on a range of contradictions that play out around the dual representation of the characters as both struggling and harmless, and powerful and dangerous. It begins by considering their construction as clowns, which comically exposes their absurdity and vulnerability, and renders their flaws endearing (Lecoq, 2002).

Part of what sets the characters up as clowns and allows the audience to read their flaws as humorous – and even charming – is their visual presentation. They wear bizarre and mismatched outfits that highlight their physical idiosyncrasies to comic effect. Their oversized moustaches function like the mask of the clown – exemplified by the red nose – which facilitates the transformation of the performer as well as highlighting qualities of ‘naivety’ and ‘fragility’ within the character (Lecoq, 2002:154).

In addition, their construction as opposites positions them in the typical dynamic of the clowning duo, in which oppositions in appearance and temperament – as well as tensions that arise from this – are humorously exploited (Lecoq, 2002). The physical contrast between Corné – who is tall and lean – and Twakkie – who is short and stocky – makes the work immediately arresting visually and sets up expectations of comedy. Further points of contrast that drive the action and the comedy include Corné’s languid effeminacy in contrast with Twakkie’s compact and explosive physicality; Corné’s cerebral verbosity in contrast with Twakkie’s instinctive and impulsive reactions; Corné’s sly deceitfulness in contrast with

Twakkie's lack of diplomacy or guile; and Corné's arrogance in contrast with Twakkie's insecurity. Within the framework of clowning these qualities come across as odd and amusing and pose no threat to the audience.

Corné and Twakkie are inseparable but frequently cruel to one another, and this interplay of intimacy and aggression is also often pivotal to the action and the comedy. The power dynamic that plays out between them manifests most frequently in Corné's domination and manipulation of Twakkie. However, part of what makes the work interesting – and often unpredictable – is the reversal of these roles, which also reveals contradictions in the characters' personalities and blurs simple oppositions between them. For example, Twakkie at times becomes cunning in relation to Corné in a way that suddenly undermines his apparent innocence and their conventional power relationship.

However, a more fundamental contradiction plays out in relation to a further facet of the characters' construction as clowns, which relates to their persistent failure and vulnerability.

Particularly within the tradition of clowning that is associated with Jacques Lecoq's teaching, the clown is distinguished by his / her transparent desire – often for something that the audience can provide or withhold. As Lecoq suggests, the comedy of the clown relates to the naivety of his / her desire and his / her attempts to fulfil this desire, as well as the fragility that is revealed around the inevitable failure of these attempts (Lecoq, 2002). In line with this, the comedy of *TMAS* performances is often based on revealing cycles of hope and disillusionment around the repeated frustration of both characters' desires. This plays out in different ways in the characters of Corné and Twakkie.

Corné's principal desires concern affirmation, regard, and material gain. His actions serve one of two purposes: to demonstrate intellectual or physical prowess, or to make a profit. However, the performance highlights the absurdity of his intellectual and sexual pretensions, as well as his moneymaking schemes.

Twakkie displays conflicting desires for power and independence, and approval. He vacillates between attempts to intimidate the audience with fierce displays of aggression, and attempts to rein in his temper in order to please Corné. However, his aggression is presented as ridiculous, as he is physically diminutive and often comes across as child-like or

effeminate. The tragedy of his situation is that he succeeds neither in asserting himself nor in pleasing Corné.

The clarity and simplicity of the characters' aspirations and disappointments communicate the characteristic innocence of the clown, whose faults never detract from the sympathy that we feel for his / her child-like folly (Lecoq, 2002). In this sense Corné's arrogance and greed and Twakkie's unpredictability are fundamentally harmless and reflect typically human weaknesses in a manner that is neither threatening nor disturbing.

A further desire that the characters share and that drives their actions, is to construct an 'amazing' performance. It is often in their desperation to do this, as well as their continual failure in this respect, that their vulnerability most keenly emerges.

The Baxter show in particular plays on the characters' failure to construct their sought-after 'most amazing show'. In the opening sequence we see their desperation as they try to construct a dazzling fireworks display with party poppers. They are pathetically dwarfed on the empty stage as they vacillate between frantic activity and awkward silences, in which their heavy breathing reveals their exertion. As the following extracts demonstrate, we are presented with Twakkie's panic and Corné's despair as their efforts fall flat.

In the first extract, Corné interrupts Twakkie as he tries to create the illusion of a spectacular lighting effect by hysterically swinging about a miniature disco ball, screaming "Disco!"

Corné: Twakkie!

Twakkie: **(suddenly frozen, nervously)** Still too much?

Corné: Yes it's too much. It's flippen embarrassing guy. You look desperate. You make it look cheap.

Twakkie: **(dejected)** I *am* desperate. **(pause)** And it *is* cheap.

In the second extract, Corné addresses the audience after reprimanding Twakkie for once again having disrupted the performance:

Corné: **(bitter tone)** I'm so sorry. I'm really sorry to all of you guys. You know you're thinking you've got a big show, big budget, big poppers, big lights, you think you're

famous, you think you finally made it big, but you forget you still have a small side shit who is a big doos. That's what you forget.

The performance continually plays upon the vulnerability of the performer, who is exposed to the critical gaze of the audience, and constantly trying to win its approval. At one point Twakkie, unable to withstand the strain of this position, breaks down and erupts at an audience member:

Twakkie: What? (increasingly **aggressive**) What? Don't look at me. Don't look at me guy. Don't sit there and look at me! (**working himself up into a frenzy**) I told you guy, shit. Do you think it's easy for me to sit here and talk kak to people the whole night? No, I'm up here changing lives but you're sitting down there with your stupid flippen face, your kak hairstyle and your eyeballs of judgment! I'll moer you guy! I'll moer you!

Often the vulnerability of the exposed performer is highlighted visually, by the manner in which the characters' bodies are constructed and displayed on stage. As I have suggested, idiosyncratic features of the performers' bodies are highlighted – and even exaggerated – within the characters' construction as clowns. For example, Van Vuuren exaggerates his stockiness by stiffening his body, and exaggerates his shortness by hunching over and thrusting out his chin. In addition, the characters are often physically exposed, through ill-fitting clothes as well as partial nudity, in a manner that opens them up to humiliation. This is particularly evident at the end of the Baxter show, when they perform a dance in their underwear. While the bright stage lights highlight their physical imperfections, the choreography highlights the limitations of what their bodies can do. The comic exposure of personal idiosyncrasies and limitations that is demonstrated in this scene is typical of clowning, and highlights the level of vulnerability that such performance demands.

In this regard is important to note that the vulnerability of the characters, through their repeated defeat and exposure, is a central source of comedy and a key to the success of the performance. As a result the characters' failure to construct a successful performance and to portray themselves in a positive light paradoxically achieves these desires. While the audience is given permission to laugh at the characters' struggles and failures, it is also made aware of the ways in which the characters are neither struggling nor failing.

This indicates two levels of signification that may be engaged in a reading of the work, corresponding to the sense in which performance is always, as argued in Chapter Three, both concrete reality and representation. In terms of this dual construction, performance may be read both in terms of what it presents, that is, as a representation, and in terms of a meta-awareness that is indeed *presented* or performed, that is, as a reality. Within *TMAS*, this plays out as follows. At one level, which concerns what the actions of the characters immediately represent, they fail at what they set out to do. At another level however, which recognises the constructed nature of the performance and views it within a broader performance and real life context, the audience's response and the wider popularity of the work constructs it as a success. In this way the dual construction of the work as reality and representation allows it to establish contradictory meanings. This highlights the relatedness of two forms of liminality within the performance event that *TMAS* constructs. The liminality that it derives between settled meanings is in part a function of the liminality that it derives between reality and representation.

Importantly, the success of the performers also constitutes a source of power, in the sense that it heightens their status, and gives them a hold over the audience, which wants the amusement that they can offer. In another paradox therefore, the performers derive power from their vulnerability. In addition, the performance further empowers the performers, by constructing interactions that emphasise the performers' control over the audience and their ability to expose and exploit audience vulnerabilities. Such interactions are considered in detail in section 14. The important point here is that there is a level at which the performers are set up as powerful figures that can threaten the audience. As a result, in addition to reflecting a sense of superiority or identification with the characters, the audience's laughter often reflects experiences of anxiety and disorientation.

In sum, a range of contradictions play out in the construction of the characters, including the contradiction between their vulnerability and power. The simultaneous thwarting and satisfaction of the characters' desires for success, admiration and power constructs them along contradictory lines. As I show in the course of this chapter, they emerge as both ignorant and shrewd, idealistic and cynical, backward and ahead of their time. While there is a sense that they are barely holding the performance together, it is also clear that they are in full control, to the point of being able to manipulate, and even abuse, the audience. In this

way the relationship between the performers and the audience is fundamentally ambivalent. The significance of this is examined in section 14.

Contradiction and ambivalence therefore run throughout the work. The sections that follow examine how this plays out in within the work's interaction with post-election constructions of cultural and social transformation.

13. Constructing cultural hybridity and destabilising rigid difference

This section argues that the performances create a hybrid identity space that reflects in particular on white identities within the South African context. For this reason I propose that they participate in processes of reconstructing these identities within the post-election period. Specifically, I argue that they draw aspects of identity that are associated with a shameful and insulated past into the contemporary context of a globalising, culturally-diverse and transforming South Africa. In the process, they present identities that are open to a range of cultural influences and manifest various levels of contradiction.

This approach destabilises rainbow nation discourse's construction of diverse cultural identities as neatly compartmentalised and coherent. Furthermore, rather than presenting an overriding hybrid culture, it locates cultural hybridity within specific identities amongst the range of cultural identities within South African society. Therefore it eschews the approach of rainbow nation discourse in two ways:

1. Rather than presenting a single hybrid identity, it presents multiple hybrid identities.
2. Rather than presenting hybridity in terms of the co-existence of a range of distinct identities, it presents hybridity *within* distinct identities, as a feature of a continuous organic process of cultural construction. In this view, identities emerge as fundamentally porous, shifting and ambivalent. Therefore, the performance resists rigid constructions of difference.

First, I examine the basic reconstruction of white identity within the performances. Then I consider the implications for white Afrikaans and English identities in particular, as well as constructions of masculinity and memory within these cultural frameworks.

13.1. Reconstructing white identity

Corné and Twakkie's visual construction draws together historical, lower class and parochial images of white South African identity with a contemporary cosmopolitan aesthetic.

A distinctive element of their appearance is the 1980s aesthetic that emerges in characteristic features like prominent moustaches, 'mullet' hairstyles, 'MacGyver' sunglasses and synthetic tracksuits. In my analysis, the associations that this aesthetic evokes within the South African context are twofold. Firstly, it evokes images of white masculinity in the heyday of apartheid rule, which carries connotations of a patriarchal, bigoted and repressive cultural framework. On the other hand, the 1980s aesthetic carries broader associations with white working class identity. In the South African context specifically, this takes the form of a stereotypically unsophisticated small-town or rural white identity. Furthermore, this parochial identity is often also associated with a historical identity, so that it is similarly evocative of the apartheid past. Neither the historical nor the parochial white identity is commonly construed in positive terms. While the historical identity may be linked to a shameful history of injustice and oppression, the parochial identity may be linked to sectors of the society that are commonly perceived as marginal and 'backward'.

Therefore it is significant that the characters' aesthetic also speaks of a more contemporary and glamorous cultural identity. Specifically, it may also be associated with global popular and youth culture, which draws together a range of cultural and historical influences. In both performances the 1980s element is juxtaposed with items that contradict connotations of historical or parochial identities. For example, in the Baxter show the characters wear moustaches and sunglasses alongside items that suggest effeminacy and eclectic eccentricity, such as frilly shirts, and long faux leather coats with furry collars. In this way the historical elements are absorbed within the postmodern pastiche of popular culture. Within such a reappropriation, the 1980s aesthetic speaks of a highly contemporary cultural sensibility. As a whole, the characters' visual construction becomes compatible with a 'retro' aesthetic and with the eclecticism of trendy or 'alternative' middle class culture.

It is also significant that the characters' dress display elements of the type of African kitsch that is prominent around rainbow nation efforts to construct an 'African' cultural identity. For example, in the Baxter show Corné's vest is printed with an African design, and in the

Festival show he wears a tiger print dressing gown. In this way, images of a commonly frowned upon historical identity are juxtaposed with images that suggest participation in a celebrated new South African identity.

To summarise, the employment of historical images and pastiche allows the audience to read the characters at several levels at once:

- As suggested earlier in the chapter, as clowns and therefore in a sense misfits, dressed in bizarre combinations of ill-fitting clothes
- As relics from a problematic past
- As members of the lower economic rungs of society – the homeless and the poor
- As parochial, and therefore somewhat culturally ‘backward’
- As cultural trend-setters, successful and timeous, at the centre of popular youth culture and of a transforming society

Similar contradictions play out in the construction of the characters. I have already considered how they are constructed as simultaneously pathetic and powerful; failed and successful. My suggestion here is that this may be associated with their dual construction as parochial and urbane; historical and contemporary; marginal and trend-setting.

Commonly circulated representations of the characters emphasise that they were born in a ‘trailer park’ and continue to live in a caravan. As I do, many audience members will bring this awareness to their reading of the work. However, this aspect of their cultural construction is also alluded to in the performances. For example in the Baxter show Twakkie rants about always having to park the trailer, while Corné sets a childhood story in a location that suggests, within a South African frame of reference, a lower class small-town background: “I was running there through the little field near the piece of grass there near the Diskom in Melkiesbrug near Vredendal”.

In addition the characters’ behaviour often locates them within stereotypical constructions of white working class and semi-rural identities. They display some of the most negative aspects of such constructions, coming over as ignorant, uncontrolled, brash, crude, lewd and aggressive.

On the other hand, the characters also reveal sensibilities of a global and modernised context. They display shrewd readings of situations and people that construct them within a very contemporary framework. In the Baxter show Twakkie approaches a teenager and casually remarks, "Stoned teenager... It looks like you smoked a fat one... This is not paranoia, it's actually happening". The urbanity and the wit evident here contradict the construction of backwater hooliganism. The sense of ironic distance and cynicism that permeates the work speaks of – and also to – a young, middle class and cosmopolitan point of reference. At times – as in the example above – it emerges directly in what the characters' say, but mostly it emerges more indirectly in the 'voices' of the performers who are located behind the characters and satirise them.

Their representation as poor and struggling, and unable to fit into a globalised and transforming society is juxtaposed with their status as icons of contemporary youth culture, able to participate in contemporary discourses and at home within a cosmopolitan context. They are constructed as ridiculous, marginal figures within the context of a modern, 'new' South Africa, vestiges of an embarrassing past and representatives of an undeveloped and struggling segment of society, but their ironic employment of these qualities enables them to construct themselves as young, 'hip', 'cool' and 'sexy'. Multiple levels of contradiction play out as the characters' oddness and lack of sophistication contradicts their claims to fame and celebrity. However, their actual fame and celebrity also contradicts the constructions of awkwardness and failure and even reconstructs this as a source of popular appeal.

Language is also an important aspect of the performance that constructs the characters within a very current, culturally-diverse South African framework, eschewing their construction as historical or conservative. Specifically, the characters' language reveals the construction of white identity within intimate engagement with other identities. In this way, it becomes an important site for cultural hybridity.

A feature of *TMAS* that is frequently remarked upon is the bizarre accent of the characters, which calls up a range of typical South African accents without quite matching any of them. A common assumption is that it is an Afrikaans accent. This is supported by the fact that the characters' names are Afrikaans. They also speak fairly broken English, suggesting that they are not first language speakers. Furthermore, it is true that in the initial phases of the show the characters sounded very Afrikaans. While their accent still has some resonance with an

Afrikaans accent, it has subsequently shifted into something more complex and unique. Rust (2002) describes it as “a bizarre mixture of French, Cape Flats slang and Afrikaans”, while Tromp (2003:11) refers to the characters’ dialect as an “amalgamation of kwaito-black and poor-white stereotypes”. To my ear it has elements of an Afrikaans accent, but also of South African Indian, coloured, and black English accents. Furthermore, part of its distinctive sound and structure is also a feature of South African English, which is characteristically ‘mangled’ within its own inventions and its appropriation of aspects of other local languages.

In terms of speech patterns and phraseology the characters’ language links most strongly to Afrikaans – as evidenced by their prominent use of words like ‘kak’, ‘moffie’, ‘doos’ and ‘moer’ – and to the kind of ‘ghetto’ speak that black South Africans have adopted from urban black American culture, which emerges in phrases such as ‘pull it tight’.

Finally, the characters’ accent and way of speaking has some – albeit fairly vague – resonance with the distinctive accents of *South Park*, a satirical American cartoon that is popular amongst young middle class South Africans. It is interesting that *South Park* is also an example of the type of irreverent sardonic stance of global youth culture that is reflected in *TMAS*. In this respect the language of the performance is revealing of the manner in which it combines local and global influences in the construction of a show – and also a cultural identity – that is distinctively South African.

Corné and Twakkie’s language represents a strange polyglot of linguistic influences. The effect is an original dialect that is partly familiar within the South African context, yet also distinctively strange. Given the centrality of language within creation of culture, this suggests a sense in which the work engages in the construction of culture and specifically the construction of a hybrid culture that absorbs various forms in order to become something new.

This interfaces interestingly with prominent contemporary performances, which also foreground language, but often do so in a manner that distinguishes familiar and clearly bounded constructions. In contrast, *TMAS* fuses and mutates such accents so that they become more difficult to place. This also blurs clear distinctions between the cultural identities that they evoke.

Another distinctive feature of *TMAS*' linguistic approach is that the performers refrain from doing what is typical of contemporary white comedy routines as well as advertising, which is to adopt words or expressions from African languages, such as 'eish', 'haibo', and 'yebo', into English. This may be viewed as another example of how they distance themselves from common, superficial displays of participation in cultural diversity and merging.

Up to this point I have argued that the performances reconstruct aspects of white identity that are commonly associated with South African segregation and isolation, within contemporary cosmopolitan context. In particular, these aspects are brought into contact with global popular and youth culture, as well as other South African cultural identities. The sections that follow further consider this process of reconstruction, particularly as it relates to white Afrikaans and white English identities.

13.2. White Afrikaans identity

Post-election concerns of white Afrikaans-speaking South Africans have reflected the peculiar position of this group within the context of the 'new' South Africa. In the immediate aftermath of institutional apartheid Afrikaners, who were identified as the principle oppressors of the apartheid era, experienced great uncertainty about their position in the new dispensation. These anxieties have focused prominently on the survival of Afrikaans culture and language (Hauptfleisch, 2006; Krog, 2007). While they have to a large extent been assuaged in the years following the political transition, Afrikaners are still faced with the challenge of reconceptualising their position in South Africa, particularly in view of their problematic history as invaders and oppressors.

Afrikaans theatre has reflected these concerns and challenges. Hauptfleisch (2006) identifies key issues in Afrikaner consciousness that played out in theatre in the immediate aftermath of institutional apartheid, and to some extent continue to play out in post-election works. These include: "...the threat to the language, the need to engage with Africa, the need to confront latent racism and discrimination" (Hauptfleisch, 2006:194). Afrikaans theatre therefore displays a twofold concern with the preservation of the language and with reconceptualising Afrikaans identity within a multi-cultural context. Furthermore the latter entails an engagement with history and specifically, a re-evaluation of identity within the context of this history (Botha, S., pers. com.; July 26, 2007; Hauptfleisch, 2006).

TMAS is interestingly positioned in relation to Afrikaans culture. It is not an Afrikaans work, yet it is often interpreted as a reflection on Afrikaners. Much of the controversy around it stems from the common perception that it mocks Afrikaners and presents them as 'backward'. I have already suggested what may encourage such an interpretation, including certain visual and linguistic features that evoke Afrikaans identity, and a common association of parochialism with Afrikanerdom. What is interesting however is that this interpretation allows the work to speak to Afrikaans culture, while it is at the same time distant from it. It suggests the possibility that the work deals with issues of Afrikaans identity from a position outside of the culture. This does not mean that Afrikaners do not watch it, but rather that it falls outside of the main – and indeed active – paradigms of Afrikaner cultural exploration, both within established theatre and in alternative culture^{xxvi}. The paradox that emerges around *TMAS*' engagement with Afrikaans culture is therefore that it engages in processes of Afrikaner identity without speaking Afrikaans, which is so pivotal to this identity. This is illustrative of the level of contradiction that plays out within its approach.

If the work is read as a commentary on Afrikaners, the contradictory construction of the characters acquires particular significance. On the one hand they are represented as impoverished, failing and ignorant. There is something defeated and desperate in both characters, which, if read in relation to Afrikaner identity, may evoke something of the Afrikaner's struggle to find a place in a 'new' South Africa. It may also echo an earlier phase of Afrikaner history, before its rise to power under the Nationalist government, in which poor and rural Afrikaners were looked down upon by English South Africans. These interpretations then also accommodate the perception that the performances present Afrikaners as 'backward'. On the other hand however, the characters are also constructed as successful and popular within the new context. They are at ease within it, embracing various aspects of its multicultural and global nature in order to construct a unique identity. They are able, for example, to shift unselfconsciously in the Baxter show between send-ups of the global media and performances of kwaito and hip hop, which are other South African cultural forms. In this respect they cast a different light on Afrikaner identity, which emerges as fully engaged with and adapted to a transforming South Africa.

Overall, *TMAS*' construction of Afrikaner identity is contradictory. It is both a relic of another era, steeped in a history of racist oppression and stripped of its former power, and it

is firmly embedded in a post-election South African society, reinvented and able to thrive on new terms. This contradiction may be related to the struggle of many Afrikaners, who remain ambivalently poised between these possibilities.

Antjie Krog (2007) writes about the difficulty that young Afrikaners experience with regards to their cultural history. Specifically, she considers the difficulties of finding positive cultural role models when the past is shameful and frowned upon. In the light of this, she looks at the popularity amongst the Afrikaans youth of a song by Bok van Blerk, entitled 'De La Rey'. She proposes that the song constructs a prominent figure in Afrikaans history that is not tarnished in the same way as apartheid patriarchs, as a role model. In this way it shows an appropriation of Afrikaner iconography and symbols in a manner that erases their associations with the apartheid past. This constructs a form of absolution, and the possibility for young Afrikaners of retaining a sense of cultural history and identity, whilst also forming part of a transformed South Africa. In my view *TMAS* may fulfill a similar function, in the sense that the figures of Corné and Twakkie also reappropriate elements of a problematic past within the context of a multi-cultural South Africa. They present these elements as though untainted, and allow them to speak in a novel and unapologetic way. The fact that Venter is Afrikaans may further highlight the significance of the characters' construction for Afrikaans identity.

This may also be linked to the dynamic that Blom Hansen (2005) describes regarding interactions of theatre and culture in the South African Indian community. He comments on the confusion of the Indian community in the post-apartheid context. On the one hand the end of apartheid signaled its freedom from oppression, but on the other hand it also fractured the community and in some ways rendered its position in the country even more uncertain. For this reason, there is a sense in which the Indian community is in mourning for an era that was in many ways also undesirable. Blom Hansen (2005) argues that this ambivalence has manifested through theatre in works that simultaneously celebrate and ridicule stereotypical Indian identities of an earlier era. He suggests that such comedy presents nostalgia for this era, whilst also articulating and coming to terms with new, modernised and global perspectives.

TMAS may be regarded as functioning in a similar way in relation to Afrikaans culture. Certainly, the important difference between South African Indian and Afrikaans experience

in relation to apartheid is that while Indians were oppressed, Afrikaners were oppressors. However, as Krog argues, Afrikaans South Africans also experience ambivalence in relation to their cultural history. Like Indians therefore, they are faced with the challenge of finding ways to express sentimentality and yearning in relation to a past that is also objectionable. In a similar way to the works that Blom Hansen describes, there is a sense in which *TMAS* has successfully provided a framework for both ridiculing and enjoying elements of an earlier culture. It allows for nostalgia for an earlier Afrikaner culture in a way that avoids self-loathing and is compatible with a modernised and 'transformed' perspective.

Both of the arguments detailed above suggest ways in which *TMAS* may allow Afrikaners, and to some extent whites in general, to deal with experiences of dislocation and guilt in the post-election context through the construction of new and positive identifications that still maintain bonds with the past.

13.3. White English Identity

Research suggests that white English-speaking South Africans distinguish themselves as distinctively 'culture-less'. Foster and Salusbury (2004) argue that the notion that underlies this claim to cultural neutrality is that this cultural group constitutes a kind of cultural norm, from which other groupings, which are supposedly 'culturally specific', deviate. *TMAS* is an English-language performance that is largely directed at white, English-speaking South African audiences, yet it draws on a range of cultural influences in the construction of the characters' identities and the overall performance style. South African English speakers often betray an understanding that their accent is somehow neutral, but *TMAS* constructs a form of South African English that is obviously and heavily 'accented' – and clearly porous in relation to other South African languages. In terms of Foster and Salusbury's conception, it is interesting that the image of white South African English culture and identity that *TMAS* constructs is in a sense 'filled in' by elements of other South African cultures.

This may be interpreted as a comment on the notion of cultural neutrality in two ways. Firstly, it confirms it, in that it relies on appropriating aspects of other cultures in order to construct something that is culturally vibrant. On the other hand, it also challenges it, in the sense that it shows an English identity that is always engaged with a range of cultural influences in the process of constructing itself. It also constructs a situation in which

English-speakers are clearly culturally specific, and deviate from a supposed 'normal' global English identity.

It is also significant that common constructions of white South African English identity emphasise notions of individuality and an absence of any basis for community. The experience that *TMAS* constructs, which emphasises group experience so strongly, counters this. It constructs this identity within a context of communal experience. At the same time though, the critical distance and irreverence that is so much a part of the work represents the attitude of independence that is often quoted as a quality of white English culture (Foster & Salusbury, 2004).

In sum, *TMAS* reveals the ambivalent position of an English identity that both excludes itself from cultural specificity and collective experience, and is immersed in a social and cultural context that highlights processes of cultural hybridisation and the construction of communal sentiments. Furthermore, in relation to Afrikaans and English South African identity, it destabilises neat categories of difference, such as those of rainbow nation discourse. Rather than constructing cultural hybridity as a fusion of distinct cultural identities, it constructs different cultural identities in hybrid terms.

Finally I will consider two prominent issues within contemporary reconstructions of white identity, which are interestingly interfaced within *TMAS*. Both have emerged at points within this discussion, and they concern 'masculinity' and 'memory'.

13.4. Masculinity

Various factors have contributed to experiences of 'emasculatation' amongst white males in the post-election context. The end of structural apartheid signaled the end of white male political dominance in South Africa. Subsequent programmes of redress have attempted to place white males in a particularly weak position in terms of social opportunity. At the same time South Africa is entering a global context in which gender equality is promoted and traditional constructions of masculinity are being destabilised and undermined.

In this context *TMAS*' interaction with constructions of masculinity is very interesting. It draws together a macho masculinity, rooted in the cultural idiom of an era of white male

dominance, with constructions that are profoundly undermining of traditional masculine values. Typical features of macho masculinity are highlighted. Corné in particular objectifies women, while Twakkie displays a highly masculine type of aggression, and frequently resorts to physical intimidation. The power that the characters hold over the audience contributes to their construction as strong males. The fact that Corné has a giant phallus, which is quite obviously not real, highlights the manner in which notions of masculinity are played up in the performance. Also, the characters often speak in homophobic terms, referring to audience members as 'moffie' as a form of insult. In the opening sequence of the Baxter performance Twakkie scathingly addresses an audience member that is not clapping his hands, "Even you moffie boy". The characters sing about shameful experiences that audience members may share with the Love Captain, which include incest and homosexuality: "where you can say all the things you never say. Like if you like your sister, or if you're a gay. The Love Captain, is going to heal you today". The implication is that being gay is an affliction.

On the other hand, the characters are often camp in their appearance and mannerisms, and at times even overtly express bisexuality. They are flamboyant in their appearance and often effeminate in their movements. They are also often child-like, and undermine notions of tough masculinity by exposing their vulnerability, playfulness and indeed 'silliness'. Twakkie in particular is frequently constructed in child-like terms in a way that sharply contradicts his macho bravado. In such instances he speaks in a very thin, high little voice, his eyes are large and innocent, and his shortness in relation to Corné is emphasised. This is particularly evident in the Baxter show. There is a scene in this performance in which Corné prepares for a song. He holds Twakkie's hand and the image constructs them clearly as adult and child. Twakkie's fearful reaction to the squirrel and his naïve excitement about the disco ball also constructs him in childlike terms. He also makes a characteristic child-like squeaking noise.

Reddy (2005) describes the manner in which the apartheid South African army – which exemplifies white macho identity in the South African context – encouraged scorn and suppression of all traces of feminine or childlike behaviour. *IMAS* shamelessly draws these elements into a (re)construction of masculinity. In a way it reflects broader cultural shifts in masculinity that are associated with a 'yuppiness' and 'metrosexuality', but even in terms of these concepts it pushes the boundaries of what may be considered 'masculine'. In this way

it reflects a prominent theme in South African culture and one that plays out specifically in Afrikaans theatre, which is “the ‘unmanning’ of the white male” (Hauptfleisch, 2006:187). The question of Afrikaans identity is at times also directly evoked. In the Festival show Twakkie holds an audience member and says to him: “I’d cry too if I looked like you. He shouted at you a lot, meneer. You could never pass the rugby ball straight” (June 29, 2007). It is spoken in jest but it highlights the pressure of constructions of male identity in Afrikaans culture, in which masculinity is culturally linked to both elements alluded to in this comment – playing rugby, and highly authoritarian and disciplinarian control. By juxtaposing aspects of this masculinity with elements that contradict it, *TMAS* also participates in a process of unsettling conventional constructions of masculinity and a redefinition of masculinity in broader terms, suited to a changing South African society.

13.5. Memory

I have previously quoted Hlongwane as maintaining that “a pervasive rhetoric of amnesia permeates the social fabric” of South African life (2006:1). There are indications that this is particularly the case amongst young white South Africans. Rudakoff (2004) questions a range of South African theatre practitioners about whether there is still a need for theatre to deal with the country’s past. She notes a clear distinction between black practitioners and the generation of older white practitioners, who feel that it is still very relevant, and the younger generation of white practitioners, who feel that the matter has been saturated and that theatre must now look at other concerns. In a sense *TMAS* is representative of this viewpoint. It is made by young white South Africans, mostly plays to young white South Africans, and makes little direct references to issues of history or politics. The show constructs a space that is strangely a-historical. The characters’ histories are bizarre and almost unbelievable, and they are most vital in a kind of perpetual present in which the past is reduced to a number of items of clothing. In many ways *TMAS* may be regarded as an example of the kind of work that has emerged in the post-election desire to escape difficult realities – both of the present and past – of South African life. It provides laughter and at a certain level clearly functions as ‘light entertainment’.

On the other hand there is a sense in which the work does evoke memories of the past. As suggested before, the visual construction of the characters speaks of an era of Afrikaner domination. In this way, it calls up associations with history even though this is rarely

directly articulated. At times though, South African history and specifically the issue of white forgetfulness in relation to this history, is directly referenced. In the Festival show Corné looks at an audience member and says: “Look at this little Afrikaner. Do you remember Apartheid? I do” (June 29, 2007). Later in the show the audience is asked to raise their hands. Corné’s instruction is: “Put your hand in the air, pretend it’s apartheid”. He then indicates a black audience member, and says: “The black guy can remember it. It was pretty shit”. Next he points to a group of older white audience members towards the back of the crowd and says, “The white guys at the back are still pretending it never happened”. Pointing directly at an older white man in the audience, he says: “This time pretend you cared” (June 29, 2007).

The next step in this sequence is that the audience is asked to start making pulsating movements with their hands, which are now raised. Corné’s instruction here is that the audience must “‘mof’ up apartheid”, adding, “I always wanted to do this” (July 3, 2007). This moment highlights the manner in which elements of history – and of an extremely traumatic history – are absorbed within a highly contemporary idiom, and in a way transformed. The performance effects a re-articulation of history and of memory. Its interaction with history is indirect, and the present is privileged, but the history of apartheid is briefly recalled, acknowledging its influence on the present.

13.6. Conclusion

It is noteworthy that elements of the aesthetic and particularly the language of *TMAS* has been absorbed in contemporary South African middle class – and mainly white – youth culture. Many of their catchphrases, such as “could you believe it?” and “my guys, ladyguys and guyladies”, have been absorbed within common speak, particularly within circles of young people who follow the show. This reflects Flockemann’s (2001) notion of a grounded aesthetic, in which people actively employ aesthetic elements in the construction of identities. It reveals the intimacy of reality and representation, and of social reality and performance, and suggests that *TMAS* is directly involved in the construction of new South African identities.

14. Destabilising discourses of healing and unity

Although section 12 reveals a range of contradictions within the construction of Corné and Twakkie, it also emphasises that the characters are a stable element within TMAS performances as well as the broader phenomenon of the work. A second constant that is of relevance here is that Corné and Twakkie attempt to engage the audience in a spectacularly healing and entertaining experience. In this section I show that the experience that they try to construct may be brought into dialogue with post-election strategies for reconstructing South African society that have centred on the notion of the rainbow nation. Specifically I argue that it may be read both as a subversion of this discourse, and as achievement of its underlying goals.

Throughout the discussion I examine paradoxical elements in the work, as well as ways in which boundaries are transgressed. My argument is that both dynamics construct a space of liminality that subverts settled discourses and allows new possibilities to arise.

14.1. Establishing dialogue between TMAS and rainbow nation discourse

14.1.1. A basis for dialogue between TMAS and rainbow nation discourse

Importantly, I do not suggest that the performances should be read as a deliberate or direct commentary on rainbow nation discourse. Rather I am arguing that, within the relational reading proposed in this research, they may be brought into dialogue with this discourse. There are a number of features that establish a basis for such dialogue.

The first is that TMAS is constructed in the framework of contemporary South African culture and society. As the previous section has demonstrated, it is rooted in a South African idiom and references a range of typical South African identities. Furthermore the comedy often centres on issues that are prominent in the contemporary South African context, such as racial difference, crime and violence. Therefore, when the work is read in this context, it is possible to associate what happens in the show with broader patterns of South African experience. Specifically, I will argue that the performance may be associated with 'rainbow nation discourse', and often with the way in which it has been constructed within an increasingly globalised, consumerist South African context.

In this discussion I use the term 'rainbow nation discourse' fairly broadly in order to refer to post-election processes of social and cultural transformation that have been initiated by key

players in the transition, often (but not exclusively) focusing on the construction of a South African nation. The focus here is less on the construction of a unified South African nation, and more on related endeavours to encourage reconciliation, harmony, and a positive sense of the collective. It therefore refers to the rehabilitation of a damaged society and processes of overcoming trauma and segregation. Importantly, the analysis looks at the representations of a 'rainbow' South African society that often frame these endeavours within the public domain. That is, it focuses on the form in which the broad concept of the rainbow nation has been absorbed within the public domain, particularly within the media, advertising and popular entertainment. I suggest that this reflects a form of rainbow nation discourse that has been 'bastardised' in its construction within a globalising fixation with consumption and entertainment.

In the following section I consider specific aspects of the performance that may be brought into relationship with this conception of rainbow nation discourse.

14.1.2. Collective healing: links with rainbow nation discourse

In both performances Corné and Twakkie set out to 'heal' the audience. They promise to provide an experience that helps people to come to terms with their difficulties, and to overcome them. Often they base this claim on the notion of spreading 'love', which they view as something that unites all people in an overriding experience of celebration and joy. The sense is that all troubles will be washed away by an exuberant experience of community. Negativity will be transformed into a positive attitude. These notions of healing and integration, and specifically their construction within positive group experience, echo rainbow nation discourse and the manner in which it has been promoted within the media and advertising.

I will look briefly at the manner in which these elements play out in the performances.

14.1.3. Healing

Notions of healing recur in both performances. As Twakkie puts it in the Baxter show: "I'm up here changing lives!" Often this is articulated in therapeutic terms. In the Festival show Twakkie rocks a young man in his arms, saying: "Don't cry. Ok, cry. Let it out ... He's got a lot of pain this ... guy. I'm having deep therapy here" (July 29, 2007). In the Baxter show

he sits on an audience member's lap, holds his hands and looks deeply into eyes as he says: "It's painful". This attempts to evoke an empathetic therapeutic encounter.

In both shows the characters construct a range of therapeutic exercises. These are purported to resolve or integrate all the conflicts and strains that characterise people's lives – their "stresses", "fears", "anxieties", "worries", and "embarrassments", and as Corné puts it in the Baxter show, "all this pain you experience, the constant rejection and ridicule". An example occurs at the end of the Baxter show, when audience members are guided through an exercise that supposedly releases the '*kak* vibes' that have lodged in their shoes. They are asked to imaginatively locate all their negative energy in their shoes and then to release it with a movement and a sound.

Corné in particular, specifically in his guise as 'The Love Captain', is constructed as a healer. In the introductory sequence of the Baxter performance he sings: "I'm gonna guide you, heal you, and make you feel love. I'm the Captain, Corné, the white peace of dove". As the allusions to 'peace' and 'love' suggest, Corné's construction of healing centres on experiences of interpersonal warmth and harmony. As I will show, it is often in the context of affectionate social experience that the healing that the characters promise is supposed to take place.

14.1.4. Love

In both performances the characters aim to spread 'love'. They project attitudes of warmth, acceptance and care. Often they are very demonstrative in their expressions of 'love', verging on, and at times becoming, overtly amorous. This is demonstrated in a scene in the Baxter show in which the characters become fully immersed in expressing 'love'. It starts off with both characters hugging a particular audience member and repeating that they love him. They begin to move through the audience, becoming progressively more excited, as they express extreme and unreserved 'love' for a range of audience members. The following is an extract:

Twakkie: (*shrill*) Lady! I also love you lady!

Corné: Guys I love you, too much!

Twakkie: I love this lady. Guy! I love you! I love your dad guy!

Corné: **(with sordid enjoyment)** Sis, stick your tongue in my mouth **(Sound of Corné's sloppy kisses and heavy breathing)**.

Twakkie: I'm coming for you lady!

Corné: Ugh lady you drive me flippen nuts! **(starts taking his clothes off, stripping down to his pants)** I can't take this lady.

Twakkie: I love the shit out of this guy. Shit. Kiss me **(kisses him)**. **(With a perverse sense of pleasure)** Ugh that taste like shit. Lady do you mind if I do a handstand in your crotch? I have to do it. **(He does a handstand with his head in her lap, squirming and squealing)**.

Corné: Guy, wow, Billy Idol as an Afrikaner! Love it. And a bald guy also. Love it.

Can I taste it guy? **(Licks man's head)** I love it! I love all of you! ... Hello! I love you!

This scene acquires almost Dionysian dimensions, as the characters writhe over the bodies of audience members, start undressing, kiss, lick, smell and generally express adoration in an almost delirious manner. As Corné puts it: "Shit, I'm intoxicated of love. I love all of you".

The conflation of 'sex' with 'love' that is evident here resonates with the manner in which 'love' is constructed within the popular global media, which reveres and prominently displays romantic and sexual love, both for commercial and entertainment purposes. Later in the discussion I show that part of *TMAS*' subversion of discourses of healing and unity consists in satirising the manner in which they have been constructed in the framework of a global commercially- and entertainment-driven culture.

What is of importance here however is that this indiscriminating love, which breaks down boundaries between people and enfolds everyone in a purported state of joy, is constructed as a source of unity. As I suggest in the following section, it locates healing in the context of shared or communal experience.

14.1.5. Communal experience

Both shows harness the basic structure of the performance event as a communal gathering. They engage audience members in a number of group exercises, stressing the notion of collectivity. In Corné's terms, they emphasise "the style of togetherness" or "the 'together' concept" (Baxter show).

Particularly in the Baxter show 'healing' is often constructed in the context of these group exercises. In the exercise that aims to dislodge negativity from people's shoes, audience members face one another, exchange their shoes, and say: "Thank you for your kak vibes. Thank you for taking my kak vibes". Then everyone applauds. It is set up as a ritual of sorts that unifies people and releases negativity through an act of exchange.

The show ends with a particularly exuberant collective event. Corné and Twakkie perform a dance with a number of audience members. The music is unashamedly sentimental, as the characters roll over the participants' bodies, moving with them, and staring melodramatically into their eyes. Then on a signal, the entire auditorium throws balloons, confetti and toilet rolls, which, on Corné's instruction, "must fly into the air like giant streamers of human love". Although the effect is ridiculous, my impression is that at this moment it does construct a sense of buoyant communal experience. The audience is collectively exuberant as they laughingly participate in this absurd event. Although it is not clear what the focus of the festivity is, it does feel celebratory. Similarly, although the significance of the event is unclear, it begins to feel meaningful, even if only for the reason that it momentarily unites everyone present. At this point it resembles the kind of events that have so often been put on display in the post-election context in order to promote the idea of a new South African society, whether for commercial purposes, or for the purpose of social transformation. Like such events aim to do, it presents a non-specific but jubilant collective experience that momentarily seems to transcend all conflict or difference.

14.2. Subverting discourses of healing and unity

The performances destabilise these discourses of healing and unity in a number of ways. At a basic level, the satirical nature of the work exposes everything that it presents to ridicule. For example the performances satirise the characters, making a mockery of their efforts and ideas. What is of particular significance is the manner in which their efforts and ideas pertaining to 'healing' and 'unifying' are ridiculed. Specifically, the sections that follow look at the manner in which these discourses are subverted by: (1) exposing their participation in a globalising culture of consumerism and entertainment, and (2) juxtaposing them with behaviours that contradict healing and unification.

Furthermore, it is argued that this may be read as a subversion of rainbow nation discourse, which has also been employed for commercial purposes within a consumer- and entertainment-driven context, and which is also contradicted by destructive and divisive behaviours. To this end, aspects of the performances that subvert notions of ‘healing’ and ‘unity’ are brought into dialogue with aspects of contemporary society that subvert dominant constructions of rainbow nation discourse. In particular, I consider the correspondence between the kind of ‘violence’ that is used as a strategy in the performance, and the highly violent nature of South African society. Both, I suggest, interrupt simplistic notions of harmony and healing.

In the course of the discussion I highlight contradictions and transgressions that locate significance in a liminal space in which settled discourses are undermined, but new possibilities also emerge.

14.2.1. ‘Healing’ and ‘unification’ within a commercialised media-driven culture

Corné and Twakkie aim to ‘heal’ the audience. Importantly, the performance highlights two aspects of their approach. Firstly, it highlights the fact that they aim to heal the audience within the context of a spectacular performance: an “extravaganbonanza of human *entertainment*”. Notions of healing and entertainment are bandied about in the performance in a manner that blurs the distinction between them. As Twakkie puts it, “this is entertainment but also like therapy”. This sets up the audience as in some way traumatised, which is an assumption that is sometimes made about South African society – that is, that everyone in South Africa is in a state of trauma as a result of apartheid. In the course of the performance we begin to feel that the ‘healing’ is part of the entertainment: it is put on display for our amusement.

It is significant that Corné, in his guise as healer, evokes associations with a range of ‘healers’ that are constructed in the popular media, blurring the distinction between healing and entertainment. His performance calls to mind talk show hosts such as Oprah Winfrey and Doctor Phil, alleged psychics like John Edward, new age teachers, motivational speakers and evangelical preachers. The satire of Venter’s performance is derived from distilling and slightly exaggerating recognisable habits of such figures – a sympathetic cock of the head, a gentle, measured tone of voice, a self-effacing smile, or a casual air of authority, as well as

revealing the self-satisfaction, arrogance and narcissism that often lies behind these behaviours.

In addition, Corné's speech frequently calls to mind the discourse of such figures, highlighting the absurdity of popular psychological and pseudo spiritual talk. His frequent and often inappropriate use of hackneyed sayings like "It's not about the pain, it's about the love", and "The more you give, the more you get", evokes the insubstantiality of such statements, as well as the manner in which they are often employed for the user's own benefit. At times, like in the following extract from the Baxter performance, the meaninglessness of such apparently profound language is underscored:

Corné: Please, ladies and gentlemen, lend me your ear balls, open your hearts and I will open my mind, give me your eyes and I will give you my vision, give me your soul (suspenseful pause) and I will give you my knowledge. For is not the sky of night bespeckled with the silver stars of dust upon the black velvet of heaven, not a reflection of the earth from which grows the trees of knowledge of the future of man? Is not the church as square as the house? Is not the wheel as long as the road is winding before the rivers of life? Is not the candle as long as the flame? Is not the moon as bright as the sun from the other side? Is not the yoyo as long as the rope?

Twakkie: And does not a sugarcoated bullshit pill still taste like bullshit on the inside guy?

Here Twakkie speaks on behalf of the audience, pointing out the absurdity of Corné's speech. Corné's pomposity and incoherence in this extract evokes something of the simplistic and patronising manner in which discourses of 'healing' are often employed by popular, media-constructed 'healers'. So too, the crudeness of the characters' strategies for 'healing' the audience – via physical displays of 'love' and 'togetherness' – may be related to the simplicity of the notions of social healing that are forwarded within popular representations of rainbow nation discourse. Both reveal naïve and one-dimensional constructions of healing, which ignore the complexity and severity of issues underlying social tension and discontentment.

There is a moment in the Baxter show that is particularly revealing of the absurdity of attempts to address serious social malaise by promoting simplistic notions of 'happy' and

'nice' social interaction. The characters ridicule a political appeal to criminals to change their ways. They construct it in the gently reproachful tone that one would use with a child, sweetly suggesting that they (that is, criminals) should 'not be like that', and that rather than 'shooting' and 'stealing', they might 'plant a tree', 'build a school' or 'give a child a heart'. This example resonates with a specific South African issue – that is, the prevalence of crime – and it also sends up community building initiatives that are prominent in the current context. It contrasts a harsh reality of post-election life with the kind of 'fuzzy' warm tone of initiatives for social good. I therefore interpret it as satire of the manner in which sugary discourses of warm, harmonious community have been employed in post-election South Africa as part of a response to a profoundly damaged society.

However, at this point I am more interested in another facet of the satire, which reveals the commercial self-interest behind the supposedly healing performance. This constitutes the second aspect of the characters' approach to healing that is significant in this discussion. The performances continually remind the audience that the primary incentive behind the construction of the spectacularly entertaining and healing event is financial. Corné reminds Twakkie of this motivation after he has disrupted the planned sequence of the performance. He asks, "You tell me who's going to buy the new gas cooker, sunshine".

At another point Corné is particularly dejected about the failure of the performance. Twakkie tries to convince Corné to continue with the show, asking the audience, "Do you guys want to see Corné do the Love Captain?" The audience responds affirmatively and Twakkie tries to cheer Corné up by pointing out that the audience loves him. However, Corné's response is biting: "They just want to get their money's worth guy". At this moment the persona of the healer / entertainer is dropped, and we have a sense of seeing the Corné behind this mask. Significantly, this person is aware of the basic reality that the performance is based on commercial exchange. The audience is there to get what they paid for, and the performers are there to give the audience what they are willing to pay for. At that point, Corné spots a R2 coin on the floor in front of him, which immediately cheers him up and convinces him to step back into his entertainer / healer persona. "Okay well there's R2's over there. Keep it coming". Not only does this highlight the commercial interest beneath claims to 'healing', but it resonates in particular with the plight of the South African performer who must do anything to survive financially.

The commercial incentives of the characters feature prominently throughout the Baxter show. Apart from the fact that the characters are continuously engaged in selling the show to the audience in recurring phrases like, "Tonight is going to be amazing", they also repeatedly point out that they are pitching parts of the show to government and other bodies. Furthermore, they build in efforts to sell other things in the course of the performance. There is an extended scene in which Corné tries to sell a particularly unattractive toy squirrel at an inflated price. Significantly, his sales pitch is that it is for a charity organisation for 'children born without wings'. Again, this satirises sentimental appeals to middle class South Africans to 'do their bit' for the community. However, the obvious absurdity of this cause also highlights the fact that the venture has little to do with human interest. Once again the work uses notions of 'healing' in order to sell something.

To summarize, in both performances the 'healing' experience is constructed as a form of entertainment, which is primarily motivated by commercial interest. Firstly, this undermines the notion of 'healing', in the sense that it is reduced to a form of spectacle, and to a commercial ploy. In this light, Corné and Twakkie's investment in bringing about healing through warm and loving interpersonal and group experience is rendered insincere. Secondly, this sets up resonance with the manner in which, as I have suggested, the popular media has blurred boundaries between entertainment and healing through figures that derive commercial benefit from their purported concern with people's wellbeing.

In this regard, the work begins to speak to the broader cultural phenomenon that constructs such blurring. That is, it evokes patterns of globalising (American) commercialism, which promotes a twin fixation with consumption, and with the sensationalist and spectacular displays of popular entertainment and the media. Within this context, entertainment is commercialised, also in the popular media, which, through the images that it circulates, also participates in fuelling other forms of consumption. Because of the prevalence of the popular media, cultural life is increasingly saturated by its images, which sustain consumer practices. This is epitomised within American culture, which displays related phenomena of (1) rampant consumerism, (2) a prominent concern with appearances and with display, and (3) a blurring of the distinction between 'real life' and representations of it, as media images infiltrate lived realities and lived realities are increasingly constructed within the media as new forms of entertainment (Appignanesi & Garrett, 1995). Indeed, the manner in which the shows satirise the characters' attempts to construct a spectacular performance and to make

money may be read as a strident commentary on this culture and on the falsehoods, façade and unbridled self-interest that it displays.

Importantly, this often emerges in the performances' satirical treatment of dynamics of advertising and marketing, which, as I have suggested, is a crucial link between the popular media and consumerism. Both performances repeatedly highlight the level of deception and manipulation that plays out in advertising. Often the characters' comments reveal subtle – and not so subtle – forms of deception that happen in sales. For example, they promote their news broadcast as taking place “every week, on the hour, right now, *twice*”, and later they claim that scientists have been working “around the clock, *seven days a month*” in order to create the toy squirrel. Corné's ludicrous praise of this squirrel, which is obviously unattractive, useless and overpriced, is particularly revealing of the patent falsity of much advertising. Furthermore, his effort to sell it as part of a good cause mocks commercially-motivated claims to charitable or altruistic intentions, and the emotional appeals that they construct.

Often the characters' marketing attempts relate to the performance itself, which they set up in extremely positive terms. However, as I have shown, this is also contradicted by the manner in which the performance continually falls flat, revealing the insecurity and incompetence of the characters. In the opening of the Baxter show the discrepancy between what the show claims to be and what it is is highlighted. Corné introduces it as follows: “Tonight we will present unto you an ‘extravagabonanza’ of human ‘*entertainment*’ with big show theatrics to match, because that’s what it says in the press release, so it must be true”. However, it soon becomes clear that the ‘big show theatrics’ amount to the characters running about the stage setting off party poppers. Corné's comment not only suggests the inaccuracy of his description, but also alludes to the way in which people commonly buy into the claims that advertising makes. A similar insinuation is made in the call and answer phrase that has become a slogan for *TMAS*: ‘Could you believe it?’ – ‘I couldn’t believe it’ – ‘Believe it because it’s true’. This may be interpreted as a reference to people's willingness to suspend their own better judgment in favour of the ‘truths’ that are circulated in contexts such as the media.

The satirical exposure of the characters' promotional strategies casts doubt on all of their claims and particularly those pertaining to healing and unification. Hence it is telling that

Corné mistakenly introduces himself as the ‘*uncredible*’ host of the show, and Twakkie as his ‘*inbelievable side crack*’. In addition, this is an example of the satirical construction of the work, which involves a continual ironic commentary on what is immediately presented. In this instance, the ‘error’ contributes an additional level of meaning that in fact communicates more accurately and insightfully than the ‘proper’ term would. Often linguistic distortions function in this way, enriching the meaning and highlighting contradictions between overt and implicit meanings within the work. Although this is not directly significant to my argument at this point, it is useful to note that it represents another form of contradiction within the work, which reflects the creation of meaning between contrary poles.

It is significant that both performances construct the characters’ discourse of ‘healing’ and ‘unity’ as an aspect of their marketing ploys. It is sold – as part of the performance event – and used in order to sell – as part of other commercial ventures. In both cases, it is constructed in sentimental and sensationalist terms in order to participate in commercially motivated dynamics of display. In this manner, this discourse is located within the paradigm of the globalising media-driven and consumerist culture that is satirised within the work.

My argument is that within a contemporary South African reading of the performances, and provided that a link is made between the characters’ discourse of healing and unity and rainbow nation discourse, this may be interpreted as a reflection on rainbow nation discourse’s construction within a similar paradigm. That is, it may be argued that in the same way that Corné and Twakkie use discourses of healing and unity in order to provide entertainment and to make money, rainbow nation discourse has been put on display for commercial purposes in advertising as well as lucrative spectacles such as *African Footprint* and *Umoja*. In this regard, the performances reflect rainbow nation discourse’s construction within globalising concerns with commercial enterprise and display. They speak of its commercial employment within South African society, both in the superficial images of spectacular and light entertainment, and in the prominently circulated images of the popular media.

In this view, the performances may be regarded as an indictment of (1) globalising influences within post-election South African society, (2) the manner in which rainbow nation discourse has been appropriated within these influences, as well as (3) the specific form that it has assumed within this appropriation. In particular, this refers to the simplistic and jovial

construction of rainbow nation discourse that I considered in Chapter Three. Within this argument these qualities emerge as features of its construction within a paradigm that emphasises quick fixes as well as superficial, prettified representations of reality. Representations of the rainbow nation present the upbeat tone, easy solutions and neatly bounded, sanitised images that run through advertising and the popular media and entertainment.

I have pointed out on various occasions that the jolly façade that the performances construct repeatedly crumbles. Within the interpretation presented here, what is revealed behind the façade of the sales pitch is significant. If the analogy with the construction of rainbow nation discourse within South African society is extended, then this may be read as a reflection of the kind of realities that this discourse obscures. The feelings of aggression and despair that continually break through the characters' projected enthusiasm and generosity becomes revealing of the level of struggle, friction and disappointment that is overlooked by depictions of the happy nation. The phrase, "It's bullshit", which both characters repeat when their attempts to construct an amazing performance fail, becomes like a refrain that evokes all of the experience that contradicts dominant discourses of healing and transformation. It may even read as a direct reference to such discourse, which as I have argued, is often inaccurate.

The section that follows looks more specifically at aspects of the performance that contradict the characters' notions of healing and unity and that may, within the analysis proposed here, be read as an analogy for facets of South African society that challenge rainbow nation discourse. This contributes to the argument that both performances highlight the contradictions that run through South African society, as wide scale experiences of disillusionment and complex patterns of discord are continuously contradicted by the images of the popular media and entertainment – including those of the happy rainbow nation.

Once again the work may be read at two levels at once, which highlights its ambivalent construction of meaning. In particular, it may be read (1) within the immediate parameters of the performance, as the event that it directly represents, and (2) within a broader context, in which its construction as a performance is recognised. While the immediate event ridicules features of globalising commercialism, the broader construction of the performance replicates them. Similarly, as I have already argued, while the immediate event reveals the

continual failure of the performers, the broader context reveals their success. The next section goes on to suggest that while the immediate event parodies supposedly healing group experiences, at a meta-level it also constructs such an experience.

The contradictions that play out within the work, because of the levels distinguished above but also within these levels, construct a continuously ambivalent process of signification that may be regarded as 'hybrid'. This is an argument that runs throughout the research. It is within the liminal space that *TMAS* constructs – in-between contradictory meanings – that it both destabilises discourses and reinvents them in new terms.

14.2.2. Negative interpersonal dynamics

Aggressive dynamics in the performances often function comically, demonstrating typical clowning scenarios of conflict and abuse. However, when the work is read in relation to South African society, these interactions may acquire a broader significance. It is interesting that there appears to be a fine line between audience members' enjoyment of aggressive interactions, and their discomfort in this regard. While the enjoyment may be read as innocent, it may also be read as callous insensitivity to aspects of South African life, or even as perverse enjoyment of others' humiliation and distress. The discomfort on the other hand may suggest that the work evokes associations with painful dynamics in South African society and in the country's recent past.

Corné and Twakkie are close – inseparable even – yet it becomes clear in this discussion that they are often aggressive to one another. However, I am particularly interested in the love / hate relationship that they establish with the audience, which has also become a distinctive and controversial feature of *TMAS* performances in general.

In both performances Corné and Twakkie break the conventional boundaries between stage and auditorium and between performers and spectators, entering the audience space and bringing audience members on stage. In the process they often also transgress conventional boundaries of social interaction. They address audience members in overly familiar terms and frequently transgress their physical boundaries through touch and proximity. As an aside, it may be argued that this concrete physical contact shifts the performances out of the theatrical mode that, in the view of performance theorists such as Lepecki (2004), highlights

the representational value of bodies, and into the mode of performance. As such, the focus is on the immediate physical experience of both performers and participants. However, at the same time the performances remain representational, in the sense that the performers do not act as themselves, but play characters. This indicates the manner in which the work blurs boundaries of representation and reality, and constructs significance within the resulting liminal space.

In the Festival show Corné and Twakkie mix with audience members as they enter. They approach individuals and greet them affectionately, as though they were long lost friends. They engage in extended, warm embraces, at times gently swaying and humming. In one case Twakkie places his head on a woman's chest. They clamber over the audience members in order to sit on people's laps. In addition, they examine audience members closely and make comments on intimate aspects of their physicality, such as smell. As Twakkie holds a woman he muses: "Lady I'm kissing your hair... The smell of peaches lady, peaches and marmite" (July 2, 2007). Audience members seem to be taken aback by this behaviour, but also display enjoyment and excitement in relation to the performers' advances. My feeling is that their shared vulnerability and shared hilarity forges a sense of collective experience before the performance has even begun. Furthermore, regardless of the characters' inappropriate and disconcerting behaviour, the level of warmth with which they welcome audience members establishes a sense of familiarity and of warm social gathering.

In the Baxter show the characters' interaction with the audience is somewhat more contained, as the theatrical set-up emphasises the separation of auditorium and stage. This often highlights occasions when the boundary between the audience and the performance is blurred, like when audience members are brought onto stage, when the performers enter the auditorium, or when they engage in an overly familiar way with audience members.

Often the tone of overly familiar interactions is flirtatious. The characters make sexual advances on audience members irrespective of gender or age. Corné in particular frequently comments on the attractiveness of audience members' and his desire for them. However, both characters direct a generalised sexual energy at the audience. The erotic undertone of their comments and physical contact with the audience heightens the transgressive quality of this behaviour. It breaks taboos and encroaches on personal space in a manner that is so intimate that, as I shall suggest, it becomes almost aggressive.

On the one hand the proximity of the performers' engagement with the audience evokes a pleasant sense of intimacy and connection, both between the characters and the audience, and within the audience, in terms of the communally ambivalent experience that it constructs. Also, it is often amusing, as the inappropriate familiarity that the performers assume and the advances that they make on audience members are constructed as elements of clowning that highlight the characters' lack of sophistication and their naive enthusiasm. Within a South African context in which people are often guarded in relation to others and careful to avoid causing offence, the sense of abandon with which the characters (also literally) throw themselves at people and risk affronting them, is especially funny.

However, there is a fine line between audience members' enjoyment of such interactions, and their sense of being threatened. Regarding the latter, the invasive quality of the intimacy also constructs it as a form of aggression, contradicting overt messages of tenderness or affection. In a sense the characters' relationships with the audience are always precariously balanced between affection and hostility. Some of the personal comments that the characters make about audience members are insulting. In the Baxter show a curly-haired spectator is referred to as 'Mr. Valcro', while another is dubbed 'the fat man'. Often insults are slipped into apparently supportive and caring comments. They emerge unexpectedly, taking audience members off guard. After answering an audience member's question about life, Twakkie very warmly tells him, "You're going to be fine guy". Corné affirms this. Then Twakkie adds, "Just wash every now and then". Suddenly the affirmation is shifted into an insult. This dynamic recurs in both performances, as vicious comments are slipped into a context of apparent intimacy.

In both shows the performers constantly appear to be pushing the boundaries of how much abuse the audience will accept, and come back for. Whenever it feels like they have pushed too far, they shift back to expressions of warmth. As a result, the work is characterised by rapid shifts between affection and aggression. Often this constructs an extremely disorientating and unsettling experience for audience members, who lose track of whether they are being 'loved' or abused.

There are countless examples of such interactions in both performances. For the sake of brevity, I will consider particularly illustrative examples from the Baxter show. They

demonstrate the manner in which audience members are drawn into situations – invited to participate and coaxed into a sense of security – only to be rejected or attacked.

The first example shows the way in which Twakkie's temper comes to play in this dynamic. In this scene, he is introducing a toy squirrel that he and Corné have created:

Twakkie: **(very gentle tone, as if addressing small children)** He's very shy, would you like to see him? Would you really like to see him? He may need some encouragement, would you like to see him?

At this point a woman in the audience laughs. Twakkie's tone suddenly becomes murderous as he addresses her:

Twakkie: Ok calm down lady shit you freaking the bleddie squirrel out! I'll bleddie moer you with one of the dead squirrels that didn't make it through the genetic testing!

Corné: **(jumping on the band wagon of hostility)** You don't see us screaming at flippen animals!

Twakkie: **(disparaging and self-righteous)** You insensitive.

Corné: Bitch.

Twakkie: Lady-bitch.

Now he makes another about-turn as he suddenly reverts back to the exaggeratedly precious tone:

Twakkie: Okay, let's bring out the squirrel.

The other examples reveal the manner in which Corné more subtly manipulates this dynamic. In the first, he gently encourages an audience member to participate in a scene, only to rebuff him whenever he attempts to do so:

Corné: **(coaxing the man onto stage in a very friendly tone)** Come with me guy. Please come on stage, **(suddenly shifting)** but no, actually don't touch me. **(shifting again, once more supportive and inviting)** Come with me guy.

The audience member becomes increasingly uncertain as this cycle is repeated several times on stage. Finally, Corné leads him back to his seat, demonstrating a last shift:

Corné: **(Positive tone)** Wonderful. **(adding matter-of-factly)** Please don't come here again.

These examples demonstrate the closeness of warmth and aggression in the performances, as well as the speed at which one transforms into the other. Importantly, this contradicts the notions of uncomplicated, unambivalent warmth and connection that underlie Corné and Twakkie's discourses of healing and unity. When the work is read in terms of the broader context of South African society, it echoes the proximity of contradictory discourses of unity and harmony and social realities of segregation and conflict within this context. Furthermore the unpredictability of the performance context, in which aggression can surface at any moment, speaks to the level of danger that characterises South African life, in which violence is a constant possibility. Both are high risk situations that demonstrate the fragility of notions that all is well and that everyone is one happy unit. It is also interesting that the performances highlight the audience's enjoyment of the discomfort of specific individuals. While this is condoned within the performance context, which highlights the humorous intent behind all actions, it may also be read as an example of social interaction that is not based on solidarity, but rather on 'othering', that is, distinguishing a sense of self in relation to a perceived 'other', who is constructed as different. Importantly, I would suggest that the work's engagement with the kind of aggressive dynamics that are prominent in South African society constitutes a large part of what allows this 'brand' of comedy to work with a South African audience.

Certainly, I do not suggest that these dynamics directly reflect on any social reality. Rather, I propose that they may be brought into dialogue with aspects of South African society that also do not accommodate notions of harmony and unity, such as those promoted by rainbow nation discourse. That is, when the work is read in relation to contemporary South African society, the contrast that it sets up between discourses of healing and unity and the troubled dynamics that such discourses deny, may be associated with the manner in which prominent constructions of a harmonious South African society fail to do justice to – and even mask – the level of trauma, conflict and segregation that still characterises it. The past has not been

resolved, and the process of transition has spurred new and more complex patterns of difference and violence. As Hlongwane argues:

What is often overlooked in this prematurely celebratory language of reconciliation is South Africa's interregnum moment. Caught between two worlds, South Africans are confronted with Antonio Gramsci's conundrum that can be specifically applied to the people of this region: an old order that is dying and not yet dead and a new order that has been conceived but not yet born. And in this interregnum, Gramsci argues, "a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (276) (Hlongwane, 2006:1).

Echoing the tension between the 'celebratory language of reconciliation' and realities of contemporary South African society, the performances continually juxtapose notions of easy 'togetherness' with representations of 'morbid' social relations.

A further point is that the aggressive dynamics that play out in the performances often demonstrate some form of social exclusion or ostracism. It happens repeatedly that one person is signalled out and deliberately excluded from the discourse of positivity. This establishes a sense within the performances that there is always some normative judgement that belies and is hidden beneath the claims to tolerance. As a result, there is always someone that cannot be incorporated into the idealised construction of the collective, and that is scapegoated.

While the performances humorously frame interactions based on exclusion and blame, they also capture real social phenomena, which feature within post-election South Africa. Regardless of the country's liberal constitution, racism, sexism and homophobia persist. The manner in which the characters' interactions work against their claims to universal acceptance may be related to the manner in which continuing intolerance undermines rainbow nation assertions of inclusivity. However, what is interesting is the manner in which they relate to specific markers of 'difference' that are prominently employed in the South African context. While on the one hand these forms of differentiation are perpetuated by the characters as well as the broader performance context, they are often not related to the discriminatory behaviours that play out within the shows.

Racial / ethnic division plays out in the basic demographic of the performances, which is predominantly white. Particularly in the Festival show, the characters draw attention to this fact in a manner that highlights the continuing salience of race / ethnicity as category of

social classification within South Africa. They express great surprise and excitement when they notice audience members who are not white, for example screaming: “A black guy!” (June 29, 2007), or marvelling, “Black guys – they are everywhere” (July 3, 2007). As suggested, showing up the ‘whiteness’ of the audience in itself comments on the level of segregation that still characterises the society.

However, overt references to race / ethnicity are also significant in the sense that they counter a tendency in post-election South African society to avoid talking about racial / ethnic difference, or openly acknowledging the extent to which concern with such difference still structures the manner in which people perceive one another and interact. The characters’ shameless political incorrectness is a source of comedy, and it may be argued that part of what makes them attractive to South African audiences is their unapologetically honest – but not malicious – approach to an issue that is sensitive within the current context. Therefore, it demonstrates one way in which *TMAS*’ comedy functions in a distinctively South African manner.

In the process of highlighting racial / ethnic differentiation the characters also poke fun at the absurdity of racial classifications. For example they marvel at what they define as “a Jewish black African white guy” (July 3, 2007). Also, they ridicule the irrational fear that often exists in relation to perceptions of difference. When Corné notices an Arabic-looking audience member, for example, he nervously cautions: “Don’t touch the Arab” (July 3, 2007). Shortly afterwards, he somewhat anxiously murmurs, “Arabs and black guys everywhere”, even though these audience members did not total more than five (July 3, 2007). Such jokes gently jibe at patterns of prejudice that are still a feature of South African experience.

What is particularly interesting however is that generally the dynamics of ostracism that play out in the work are not associated with racial / ethnic difference. Instead the characters often select markers of difference that appear random in relation to conventionally accepted markers such as race or gender. For example, they exclude someone based on a haircut, a facial expression, or even just being in the wrong place at the wrong time. This then also reveals the absurdity of prejudice, which demonises individuals on the basis of arbitrary features. In this way the performance eschews both of the common South African responses to perceived racial difference: (1) the politically correct impulse to skirt around the issue, and

(2) the construction of racial / ethnic difference in negative terms, which only rarely emerges publically, mostly in vindictive debates, and is mainly expressed in private. In this way, the work constructs an alternative approach to those that are dominant in society, based on open engagement with the process of dismantling racialised and 'ethnicised' ways of thinking.

The work constructs a similar engagement with other conventional South African markers of difference, such as gender, language, class and sexuality. For example, the characters explicitly articulate gender difference and demonstrate a similar level of political incorrectness in this area. They frequently comment on women's bodies and make passes at them, contradicting notions of gender equality that are emphasised in the post-election context. On the other hand however, they treat male audience members in a similar way. In the festival show for example Corné refers to a middle-aged man as a 'foxy bitch' (29 June, 2007). In a perverse manner, this subverts conventional patterns of discrimination based on gender.

In terms of gender, like race, patterns of differentiation that are prominent in South African society are highlighted but also destabilised, and decoupled from the aggressive dynamics that often play out around their construction in this context. Another form of contradiction plays out here. The characters are naively open about identifying distinctions along typical lines, but also emerge as paradoxically unprejudiced. The performance sets up dynamics of exclusion and ostracism, but also separates these from their typical form in South African society. It reflects aspects of South African society but reconstructs them in a somewhat different way. While similar dynamics occur in relation to categories of language, class and sexuality, the constraints of this research precludes a detailed investigation of how this plays out.

The dynamics discussed to this point unsettle the simplistic notions of 'healing' and 'unity' that the characters promote. While they constantly claim to be setting up a healing and unifying experience, in effect this experience is recurrently characterised by various patterns of aggression and exclusion. However, as already suggested, there is also a sense in which the performances do construct a celebratory communal experience. This reveals manner in which they do achieve what rainbow nation discourse sets out to do.

14.3. Conclusion

This section has argued that the performances simultaneously undermine discourses of 'healing' and 'unity', and enact these. If the work is read in relation to contemporary South African society, this holds significance for rainbow nation discourse. It is both destabilised, and its central aims are fulfilled. Furthermore, their simultaneous subversion and affirmation of notions of social integration and unity occurs within a liminal space, (1) between various layers of meaning, reflecting processes of signification that are ambivalent and unstable, and (2) between audience and spectators, reflecting the transgression of interpersonal and theatrical boundaries.

To summarise, this chapter has argued that the performances both undermine and participate in prominent contemporary attempts to affect cultural hybridity, as well as social integration.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In many ways *TMAS* emerges as a characteristic theatrical response to social, cultural and economic circumstances of the post-election context. In particular, it represents (1) 'light' entertainment that is not immediately challenging or critical, (2) an effectively marketed and branded performance, and (3) sensitivity to prominent representations of the popular and global media. In a context that demands the commercial viability of performance and also appears to favour the 'light' entertainment of popular performance and the global media, it may be argued that these features have contributed to the success of the performance.

However, what this study also suggests is that *TMAS* speaks back to the elements that have enabled its survival. For example, while the performance is media-savvy, it also emphasizes that which characterises live performance, that is, immediacy and encounter. Furthermore, its satirical construction enables it to use its popular features in order to challenge the aspects of contemporary culture from which these features stem. In this regard it undermines concerns with display and with feel-good sentimentality that are prominent in the popular entertainment and the media, as well as related cultural and economic concerns with marketing and commercial gain.

It is an important conclusion of this research that *TMAS* is both typical of and suited to its time, and inventive and critical within this framework. As a result it challenges the manner in which many would dismiss *TMAS* as 'cheap' or 'low' art that – because of its appeal to the 'lowest common denominator' of theatre audiences – does not merit academic study. What I suggest instead is that *TMAS*' popularity is part of what allows it to demonstrate the subversive and creative potential of performance in relation to social and cultural discourses. In this regard I have looked specifically at its relationship with discourses that have been mobilised in the post-election South African context in order to facilitate the construction of a hybrid South African culture, and an integrated South African society.

An appraisal of contemporary South African performance reveals a prominent post-election concern with representations of cultural diversity and hybridity. Echoing the principle discourse in which post-election cultural transformation has been constructed, that is, rainbow nation discourse, these representations display a range of distinct cultural identities, often defined in neatly bounded and stereotypical terms. I have argued that the interesting feature of *TMAS*' approach to cultural hybridity is that it blurs the distinction between

typically separate cultural identities, within the construction of particular hybrid identities. Specifically, it renegotiates existing constructions of white South African identities, in a manner that destabilises their construction within a problematic apartheid history, and in isolation from other South African cultures. This re-articulation reveals the potential of the performance as an embodied, yet clearly constructed or invented experience, to shift systems of cultural identification, and thereby to facilitate a transformational experience for spectators.

In sum, *TMAS*' interaction with contemporary South African cultural identities represents a challenge to prominent constructions of cultural hybridity, particularly within rainbow nation discourse, while at the same time reiterating the post-election concern with such hybridity.

A second aspect of post-election performance that is considered in this research and that is also prominent within rainbow nation discourse constitutes representations of an integrated South African society – healing from the trauma of the past and overcoming entrenched forms of segregation. Often this takes the form representations of community and positive interpersonal interaction in the South African context. In this regard also, *TMAS* appears both to affirm prominent post-election concerns, and challenge the form they have taken in popular representations.

Specifically, the research suggests that *TMAS* performances both undermine notions of community and warm social engagement, and construct novel experiences of the same kind. The audience is collectively engaged in the performance, unified by their nervousness and by their enjoyment. Furthermore, the experience breaks down boundaries that typically regulate social interaction in South African society, and specifically middle class and white society. This includes boundaries of physical contact as well as boundaries of what may be said, particularly relating to sensitive issues. By breaking down such boundaries, the performance initiates an unconventional level of social intimacy. Significantly, part of what rainbow nation discourse tries to do is also to break down barriers between people, and to construct closer experiences of community. In a strange and sometimes perverse manner, *TMAS* achieves this.

In addition, it may be argued that in so far as the performances allow shared laughter and a sense of social connection in relation to sensitive issues and painful dynamics, they construct

some measure of collective release as well as 'processing' or integration of this experience. In however small a way, they may therefore be regarded as forms of communal healing that transcend difficult realities through shared experience. This too may be associated with the kind of experience that rainbow nation discourse seeks to construct. Furthermore it suggests that there are moments in which the performances achieve a genuine sense of collective exuberance and celebration, much like events that promote the 'rainbow nation' aim to do. At the same time, this also highlights the difference between an experience of community that emerges organically within people's shared engagement, and hollow attempts to evoke such experiences, which emerge, for example, within commercial exploitation of rainbow nation discourse.

It may be argued that within the experiences of collective exuberance and celebration that the performances construct, they achieve rare moments of ritual catharsis. In terms of the notion of 'eventification' that Hauptfleisch (2006) refers to, this reflects a sense in which the performances become significant social events. Of course in contrast to a traditional ritual their significance is not clearly delineated within a cultural framework, and therefore may be experienced in different ways. In my experience, much of the significance of the collective experience that *TMAS* constructs relates to the possibility of establishing a sense of community that does not deny the level of fragmentation and difficulty that characterises contemporary South African life.

Perhaps a useful conclusion to derive from this is that *TMAS* reveals an organic cultural response to post-election demands for cultural hybridisation and social unification, which destabilises the content of highly influential political attempts to create a unified South African culture and society. Importantly, its ability to do so often hinges on its occupation of 'liminal' spaces – between rigid constructions of meaning, between that which it set up and once again breaks down or contradicts, between various levels of signification, and between the audience and the spectators. In this sense it highlights the impurity of theatre in which meaning is the product of spontaneous, coincidental responses, of contradiction and multiplicity, and a variety of points of view. Liminal and impure, *TMAS* reflects a form of theatre that is clearly syncretic, immanently duplicitous and unstable.

ⁱ This reflects the broadly post-structuralist view that significance is created within specific contexts and cannot be extracted from these contexts (Barker, 2000; Barker & Galasinski, 2001; Durrheim & Terre Blanche, 2002;

Sardar & Van Loon, 1999). It is addressed in more detail in Chapter Three, which deals with conceptual groundings of this study.

ⁱⁱ Following Miki Flockemann (in Solberg, 2003), I prefer the term 'post-election' to 'post-apartheid', as the continuation of apartheid inequalities and separations places a question mark over the assumption that the era has come to an end.

ⁱⁱⁱ Most prominently this has taken place within the Western avant-garde, but in the South African context it has also been expanded in relation to indigenous African forms (Hauptfleisch, 1997).

^{iv} I must make it clear that I am writing mainly about the English language industry, which includes much 'black' theatre, but does not include works made exclusively in African languages. The Afrikaans industry, which is the main counterpart of the English industry, may present a somewhat different set of circumstances. Prominent Afrikaans director and playwright Saartjie Botha suggests that Afrikaans theatre is in some ways much more abundantly funded than English theatre, particularly by the corporate world and Afrikaans-language and -culture organizations (pers. com., July 26, 2007). The English and Afrikaans theatre industries are notoriously segregated and I am not well enough informed about the latter to comment on this point.

^v There is some evidence that this is accurate. An example is the NAC's rejection of an award-winning script by Nadia Davids (*At Her Feet* [2004]) based on the suggestion that she "rewrite her script to include other racial groups" (Van Graan, 2004:1).

^{vi} *TMAS* has recently appeared as two television series on channel two of the South African Broadcasting Commission (SABC 2).

^{vii} In 2002 Malcolm Purkey writes that "... South African theatre is in crisis... Audiences have radically diminished" (2005:307). Similarly, in an interview in 2003 Anthony Akerman expresses concern about the state of theatre in South Africa "... because we just have so little of it. We made jokes for a while about theatre being an endangered species, and that's absolutely happened ... where is our audience?" (in Krueger, 2003:64). Several years down the line some improvements may be felt, but there is little indication of a radical resurgence in support for the theatre (Huisamen, T., pers. com., March 17, 2007).

^{viii} As Akerman points out, "(w)e don't have state funding anymore" but "if we had an audience, we could still do things that entailed risk" (in Krueger, 2003:64). It must also be added that Akerman questions whether South Africa ever really had a "wonderfully vibrant theatre audience" (2003:64). However, he mentions the audiences that gathered around the state theatres for 'culture', and on the other hand those that supported alternative theatre as a "rallying point for people who wanted to show their opposition to what was happening in the country, and wanted to mix racially" (2003:64). This raises an important factor in reduced theatre attendance, which is the falling away of political issues and a clear political objective around which people could "band together" (Akerman, 2003:64).

^{ix} Although, as Flockemann suggested in response to this research, *Hoot* may also be viewed as "more potentially transgressive or complex than some of the other stock favourites included at the Grahamstown Festival" (Flockemann, M., pers. com.; March 16, 2008).

^x His training is in mime and physical theatre and he has created and performed a range of physical theatre performances, including *Mung* (1999), *Wood for the Trees* (2005), and *Electric Juju* (2006). In addition, he performed as a member of First Physical Theatre Company.

^{xi} In addition to providing a context in which independently working artists can meet, network and draw creative influence from one another. Festivals have become such a dominant feature within the contemporary South African theatre landscape that there are references to a theatre 'season' that follows the annual festival circuit (Hauptfleisch, 2006).

^{xii} My comments on festival works reflect a synthesis of Temple Hauptfleisch's observations of mainly (but not exclusively) Afrikaans-language festivals, and my own observations of the major English-language festival – the Grahamstown National Arts Festival. There are differences, but I am merely presenting a general overview here.

^{xiii} Certainly, these works vary widely in quality, longevity and popular success, ranging from highly skilled performances by practitioners like Andrew Buckland, Ellis Pearson, Bheki Mkhwane, Aldo Brincat and also van Vuuren, to far more mediocre productions by a range of younger performers that draw strongly on aspects of their work whilst often lacking the technical training or expertise. The small works that are produced for Afrikaans festivals differ somewhat from their English counterparts. While they also demonstrate musical and comic elements, they tend to be more focused on text and less so on physical performance (Hauptfleisch, 2006). However my concern here is predominantly with English works.

^{xiv} Since its inception *TMAS* has played at various arts festivals as well as music and stand-up comedy festivals. Festival environments have featured prominently in its development.

^{xv} It is associated with the work of a number of practitioners who have returned to South Africa from trainings at the Lecoq School of Mime in Paris. Most prominently, this includes Sylvaine Strike of the Fortune Cookie Theatre Company, James Cunningham and Helen Iskander of Fresco Theatre, and Jennie Reznick of Magnet

Theatre. Companies that have been strongly influenced by their aesthetic include FTHK (From the Hip / Khulumakahle) and Dark Laugh Theatre Company.

^{xvi} Kornhaber (2004) for example analyses the political significance of Fresco Theatre's *Baobabs Don't Grow Here* (2004), while Sylvaine Strike's *Black and Blue* (2004) engages with race relations, and her later collaboration with Sue-Pam Grant, *Coupé* (2006), with questions of South African identity (Cairns, J., pers. com., July 13, 2007).

^{xvii} Hauptfleisch (in Solberg, 2003) comments on the gradual return of issues such as AIDS, poverty and health to an initially predominantly entertainment-oriented post-election theatre. Lynette Marais points out that theatre's struggle is now about issues like HIV/Aids, poverty, crime and violence against women and children (Marais, L., pers. com., February 26, 2007).

^{xviii} For example narrative psychology, which considers the manner in which personality and behaviour is governed by novelistic but also theatrical conventions of narrative, character and genre (Crossley, 2000). As Hauptfleisch points out, the notion of theatricalism in social formations and processes is a huge area of study in itself, dealt with prominently in the work of Erving Goffman, Elizabeth Burns and Victor Turner (Hauptfleisch, 1997:65).

^{xix} This has flown in the face of predictions of a violent revolution, in which many whites would be slaughtered or "driven into the sea" by the black majority" (Solberg, 2003:1-3).

^{xx} The term has in fact been popularised by a number of political figures, including former president F.W. De Klerk (Hlongwane, 2006).

^{xxi} Advertising and brand slogans that draw on rainbow nation discourse include: 'Simunye – We are One' (Channel One of the South African Broadcasting Corporation [SABC 1]); 'to realise the dream of an extraordinary nation it takes everyone to believe' (South African Breweries [SAB]); 'the Bakkie that helps build the nation' (Ford Bantam); 'One nation, one team, one dream' (the 2007 Rugby World Cup); 'The game of love and unity' (the 2007 Cricket World Cup).

^{xxii} In this article Anton Krueger reviews Ivor Chipkin's *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of 'The People'* (2007), and Ashraf Jamal's *Predicaments of Culture* (2005).

^{xxiii} To a large extent this has become a feature of English language performance while "verbal performance ... still dominates Afrikaans theatre, where plays are more likely to be based on formally written texts rather than on improvisation" (Hauptfleisch, 2006, p.187).

^{xxiv} Most notably, this includes the plays of 'Miracle and Wonder' (*iMumbo Jumbo* [1997], *Ipi Zombi* [1998], and *The Prophet* [1999]), and the more recent *Orfeus* (2007). However, it may also be argued that Bailey's use of local performance forms (for example in *iMumbo Jumbo* [1997] and *The Prophet* [1999]) and more popular musical and entertainment forms (for example in *Big Dada* [2001] and *House of the Holy Afro* [2004]) can also make his work more broadly accessible.

^{xxv} Perhaps some of the most sophisticated examples of this style are found in works of Andrew Buckland and Lionel Newton. Other prominent artists that work into this vein include Mathew Ribnick (*The Chilli Boy* [2002], *Hoot* [2005]), James Cairns (*Rat* [2001]), Nhlanhla Dan Mavundla (*A man and a dog* [2006]), Greig Coetzee (*Happy Natives* [2002]), Ben Voss and John van de Ruit (*Green Mamba* [2003], *Black Mamba* [2005]). There are a few new works every year that draw broadly on this style, particularly in English language circuit. Recent examples include From the Hip Khulumakahle's (FTHK) *Bird's Eye View* (2006), Craig Morris' *Hero* (2005), Fresco Theatre's *De Wet's Dream* (2005) and Dani Marais' *Prodigal* (2006).

^{xxvi} The lively alternative Afrikaans culture has developed around cultural phenomena like *Bittercomix*, the work of musicians like Koos Kombuis and Gert Vlok Nel and bands like Fokofpolisiekar.

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