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Eventifying Identity: Festivals in South Africa and the Search for Cultural Identity

Festivals have become a prominent feature of theatre in South Africa today. More than forty such annual events not only provide employment, but constitute a socio-cultural polysystem that serves to 'eventify' the output of theatre practitioners and turn everyday life patterns into a significant cultural occasion. Important for the present argument is the role of the festivals as events that foreground relevant social issues. This is well illustrated by the many linked Afrikaans-language festivals which arose after 1994, and which have become a major factor not only in creating, displaying, and eventifying Afrikaans writing and performance, but also in communicating a particular vision of the Afrikaans-speaking and 'Afrikaner' cultural context. Using the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees in Oudtshoorn as a case study, in this article Temple Hauptfleisch discusses the nature, content, and impact of this particular festival as a theatrical event, and goes on to explore the polysystemic nature of the festival phenomenon in general. Temple Hauptfleisch is a former head of the Centre for South African Theatre Research (CESAT) and Chair of the University of Stellenbosch Drama Department. He is currently the director of the Centre for Theatre and Performance Studies at Stellenbosch and editor of the *South African Theatre Journal*. His recent publications include *Theatre and Society in South Africa: Reflections in a Fractured Mirror* (1997), a chapter in *Theatrical Events: Borders, Dynamics, Frames* (2003), and one on South African theatre in *Kreatives Afrika: SchriftstellerInnen über Literatur, Theater und Gesellschaft* (2005).

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 rebuilding the country and seeking a sense of cultural unity. The desire for this is perhaps best rendered by Archbishop Desmond Tutu's famous image of 'the rainbow children of God', which led to the popular but much debated notion of the 'rainbow nation' to express the idea of unity within diversity. This in turn was later to have clear links with President Thabo Mbeki's own Pan-Africanist notion of an eventual 'African Renaissance'.

The task facing the country was not easy, and has never really been so: there are eleven official languages, plus a number of sub-cultural forms representative of a range of political, social, cultural, artistic, religious, economic, and other value systems. And there is a fraught and tumultuous history which

has left people scarred and deeply suspicious. The very notion of 'one nation' and the processes (and feasibility) of 'nation building' are indeed concepts that have engaged philosophers, linguists, sociologists, theologians, politicians, strategists, and others for the past decade or more.

One of the most effective weapons originally used in the battle against apartheid had in fact been the arts, and the theatre most powerfully so. During the time of what came to be called the 'cultural struggle', from 1971 to 1986, the *eventifying* power of the performing arts was consciously used to shift perceptions, highlight injustices, and confront realities; and this proved to be one of the more celebrated successes of that dark period.¹ In the face of the enormous task of reconstruction, reconciliation and self-realization now facing the country, the arts (in the very broadest sense) have once more been mobilized in a most remarkable fashion in a

new 'cultural struggle' in which not only the theatrical event but the theatrical system as a whole is once more becoming increasingly important not only in understanding and re-interpreting the past, but also in coming to grips with the present and in shaping the future, thus shifting perceptions across a wide spectrum and the many chasms that divide people and communities. In this process, the arts and culture festival has come to hold a special place.

Festivalization² of South African Theatre

The festival has always been a distinctive phenomenon in the history of humankind and has long been closely related to the religious, artistic, and cultural life of particular communities. Certainly it has played a distinctive role in the history of dance, drama, and music, in such varied instances as the classic Greek theatre festival of Dionysus, the medieval cycle plays for the Feast of Corpus Christi, the development of the Noh theatre, and the Ogungun Festival in Nigeria. Not always perceived as respectable, the festival has nevertheless always been an extremely important element in the processes of making theatre, as well as a distinctive cultural event in society at large.

There is obviously a vast, relatively unexplored field of study in the identification, description, and reconstruction of the history, development, and 'meaning' of the carnivalesque and festive use of indigenous ritual and ceremony among the numerous peoples and cultures of the region. This includes the cultural practices of the large and varied number of colonizing powers who settled in the area over the millennia. It is important to note that a knowledge of this history is crucial for any real understanding of the post-1970 theatre in South Africa and hence of the country's festivals. It was in the latter period that artists in the country seriously began to syncretize and hybridize various forms of performance, combining 'African', 'European', 'American', 'Eastern', and other styles to create the distinctive South African theatre and performance forms which emerged in the last two decades of the twentieth century.

This process of syncretization is very much a part of the festival culture and 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 1994.³

The period of syncretization and discovery happened to coincide with a time of gradual rediscovery, reintroduction, and/or expansion of the role of the arts festival internationally, and thus with a re-evaluation and rediscovery of festivals as important cultural drivers.⁴ This left its mark on the new South Africa as well. Beginning with a few prominent festivals in the 'seventies and escalating remarkably in the 'eighties, festivals have become a prominent, if not dominating, feature of theatre in South Africa over the past two decades.

Indeed, the number of festivals has grown to such a bewildering extent that a rough estimate points to an annual festival circuit of more than ninety, although not all are really 'arts and culture' festivals, and there is a great deal of flux in the numbers from year to year.⁵ While the aims and intentions of these festivals differ widely, many of them seem to be striving towards some kind of cultural identity and/or cohesion in one way or another, whether we are talking about the continuation or resurrection of old and established 'traditional' (also indigenous) practices, or newly (custom) created enterprises.

The practical reasons for this proliferation of festivals are manifold and complex, but the collapse of the old, focused, and wealthy state-funded theatre subsidy system, the disappearance of the need for anti-apartheid theatre, and the rise of a predominantly freelance theatre industry have been important. At the same time, the commercial success of the original Grahamstown Festival (now the Standard Bank National Arts Festival) has seen various communities discover the strategic potential festivals may have in boosting local industry, tourism, solidarity, and prestige. Besides the 'pure' art and culture festivals, numerous dedicated *niche* festivals (for example, produce festivals and food and wine festivals) have all become celebratory business enterprises.

There is a strong sense of instability about this system, and it generates a great amount of criticism and pessimism about the quality of the work being produced and long-term prospects for theatre as a viable industry in the country. While it is not the purpose of this article to explore these concerns, it may be interesting to note two of the key issues which are generally felt to lead to a decline in the quality and sustainability of theatre.⁶

Problems for Participants

The first key problem is of particular concern to artists (in this case, writers, directors, performers, and so on), and has to do with the way in which festival programmes are compiled, money allocated, and the venues assigned. The application process, for instance, is often slow and the exact criteria for acceptance are unclear. (There is often a strong suspicion that some form of nepotism or bias is at play in the choices made.)

As a result, most companies treat a festival much like a lottery, submitting multiple applications, often of general ideas rather than specific projects. They only start work once the results are out and they have an idea of the funding available. This is obviously not the way to make either true 'art' or a sustainable livelihood, since it does not really allow provision for long-term development of companies or of a substantial and serious body of work. Despite this situation, the state has continued to reduce its support for the arts, aggravating the situation.

The second problem is the perception 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. Both audiences and artists are increasingly concerned about this as more and more cities and towns find festivals to be a source of ready income – in some cases almost the only substantial source for the region. We shall return to this problem.

Yet, despite its many weaknesses and instabilities, the informal and often unstructured festival circuit has had an enormous

impact on the country and ensures that a vast number of plays and productions are put on annually in South Africa. On occasion, some surprisingly competent and even great works emerge. This in turn seems to suggest that there are authors, performers, designers, and technicians who are kept in work and that there is life in the theatre industry. Since the South African state contributes very little direct funding towards the arts today, this is of enormous value. In addition, the process of festivalization has had a marked and varied impact on the nature of the arts themselves, affecting not only the nature of theatre as a *system* – who does the work, where it takes place, how it does its business – but also the content, nature, and form of the specific works on offer.

As far as audiences and the public are concerned, the festivals appear to have encouraged a revival of three old South African traditions, namely:

Market-day gatherings in towns and cities

People used to go to the market on regular occasions to enjoy themselves while doing business, shopping, and interacting with their neighbours, friends, enemies, and colleagues. The tradition was largely supplanted by pre-packaging, supermarkets and twenty-four-hour shopping. A more sturdy marketplace tradition has survived somewhat longer in the rural and some urban black communities, and this has partially resurfaced in the post-apartheid era. The new festivals offer the same kind of regular festive setting for people to mingle, meet friends, be entertained and barter, buy, and sell goods. The impact this has had on the creation of a sense of community – particularly in previously divided settings – is worthy of study.

Celebrations linked to commemorative days

Of course the origins of such celebratory occasions vary enormously, depending on usage deriving from religious, agricultural, historical, political, mythic, and many other sources, and change over the years. Many of

these events have been indigenous to the peoples of the region for centuries. Some of the rituals were linked to the history of a particular culture or region (gatherings and celebrations by the San, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, and so forth), while others were imported during the colonial period by immigrants and rulers, and 'naturalized' in the region (Good Friday, Christmas, Guy Fawkes, Yom Kippur, Ramadan, the Cape Coon Carnival, Workers' Day). Then there were the created festivals and celebratory occasions devised by cultural groups, nationalist movements, and the government of the time (Republic Day, the Day of the Covenant, Soweto Day, Freedom Day). Finally, there are the occasions that have to do with specific activities such as sport (national competitions, international test matches, the annual Duzi Canoe Marathon, the Comrades' Marathon, the Argus Cycle Tour, and the like).

All these events naturally led to large and small celebrations attended by participants and their supporters. The tumultuous change in the socio-political structure and demographics of the country between 1989 and 1994 has altered these patterns significantly, making many of the above redundant or politically sensitive. The new festivals have thus slowly become part of a new tapestry of celebration, serving similar purposes.

Touring theatre companies

In the period from 1880 to 1920, visiting international companies and, from 1910 onwards, also local companies would criss-cross the country, visiting the towns and cities with a repertory of plays and performances. These gradually became more professionalized among local performers from about 1920 onwards, peaking in the decade after the Second World War, when the state-funded National Theatre Organization also sent out companies on the road. By 1970, however, this tradition was being slowly smothered by cinema, TV, and the urbanization of the core theatregoing public – that is, the white, middle- and upper-class city dwellers.

On the other hand, the black theatre of the time had gradually begun to take to the road,

despite the difficulties of travel and public performance under apartheid. Today, virtually all the companies tour, but it is a new kind of touring in that they visit only the festival towns and venues. However, this has brought into being an additional and most interesting new kind of touring, that of the audiences themselves. *They* now travel to the towns and venues for a festive outing with friends, in search of cultural enrichment, tourism, or simply a party. In other words, the marketplace audience has met the touring company halfway.

There are obviously a number of negative aspects to this, including the diminution of the metropolitan theatre culture: most of the festivals are short-term events in outlying towns rather than longer runs of plays in a permanent season in cities. There is a loss of cultural memory (as a result of the expense and difficulty of staging the classical works – including those of the South African canon – and the demand for new work for the new South African audiences), and a lack of job security for theatre practitioners in an event-driven theatre circuit.⁷ However, by and large the circuit of festivals has become a remarkable phenomenon with great potential for local tourism and the distribution of cultural values.

Festivals as Eventifying Systems

South African theatre is today dominated by festivals to such an extent that it has been suggested that the circuit may actually have come to represent the theatrical 'season'. There is some justification for this view, because the festivals are where plays, performances and other arts events are effectively launched and displayed. Slogans like 'As Seen at the Grahamstown Festival', 'Newly from the Oudtshoorn Festival', or 'The Hit Show of the Aardklop Festival' have become a standard and effective part of marketing. In other words, festivals are not only where the work is, but where the artistic output of the actor, director, choreographer, and so on is *eventified* and where the everyday life event (performing a play, a concerto, a dance, exhi-

biting a painting, a sculpture, an installation) is turned into a significant *cultural* event, framed and made meaningful by the presence and the responses of an audience and reviewers.⁸ Festivals thus become a means of retaining the event in the cultural memory of a particular society.

This process, if successful, may give the performance or exhibition a life after the festival by its association with the celebrity attached to that particular festival event – all this, of course, bearing in mind the essential unpredictability and instability of the theatre as business.

Festivals as Cultural Events

There is another, equally interesting function which festivals fulfil in the broader society – that of *eventifying* the issues relevant to it. Considerable attention has lately been paid to festivals and pageants from this performance theory perspective by researchers who look at the festivals as performances or as theatrical events in their own right. Such researchers tend to focus on the ideological imperatives lying behind particular festivals. These include the 1938 symbolic ox-wagon trek, the 1952 ‘founder’s day’ celebrations with the Van Riebeeck Festival, and the 1994 inauguration of Nelson Mandela and the ‘new South Africa’.⁹

As indicated, the notion of eventification implies that everyday events or issues are theatricalized, then presented to the public in a specific place at a specific time (or on a special occasion). Thus the play/performance/festival is turned into an event of socio-cultural, socio-political, and possibly even socio-economic significance. Some festivals are not only occasions for such theatricalization, but may express a point of view by their very existence as such.

By viewing them as performances in their own right rather than merely as markets for a series of specific cultural events, some festivals may be seen as celebrating particular historical or life events, or particular ideologies and ideas. They do so by framing the events/ideas in a theatrical way, in exactly the same way that a play might do.

A relatively straightforward example of this over the years has been the Van Der Stel Festival in Stellenbosch. This festival utilizes a formal public ball and an annual open-air pageant to re-enact the festivities on Simon van der Stel’s birthday, when the seventeenth-century Dutch governor is said to have visited the little hamlet named after him. By re-enacting this visit annually, the community celebrates the founding of Stellenbosch. The festival itself has no other specific purpose. However, although its outer trappings are those of any other festival (stalls, performances, eating, drinking, and promenading), over the years it has become a focus for reconciliation, a festival shared by all the community, including the immigrant communities and the worker communities from the farms.

The Eventification of Cultural Traditions

Closer to my purpose here are the trends demonstrated by two of the most prominent examples in South African cultural history, namely the Standard Bank National Arts Festival at Grahamstown (popularly known as the ‘Grahamstown Festival’, despite a range of sponsor-related official names) and the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (Little Karoo National Arts Festival), more commonly known as the ‘Oudtshoorn Festival’ or simply the ‘KKNK’.

Both these festivals have now come to play very particular eventifying roles in the theatrical system and the cultural value system of the country, comparable to what some playwrights sought to achieve through dramatic works. For example, in his play *Take Root or Die* (1970), Guy Butler celebrated the 1820 British settlers by dramatizing certain events in their lives, turning the latter into theatrical events. C. J. Langenhoven did the same for early Afrikaans culture in works such as *Die Hoop van Suid-Afrika* (*The Hope of South Africa*, 1918). I believe the Grahamstown and Oudtshoorn festivals have a similar effect.

The Standard Bank National Arts Festival, the first and most prestigious of the modern South African festivals, has been reviewed annually by most newspapers as well as in the

South African Theatre Journal, and some interesting political and economic studies of the event were published in the 1980s. It was founded more than 25 years ago and is still going strong, influencing much theatrical practice in the country. The Grahamstown Festival not only introduced the concept of the multi-disciplinary arts festival to South Africa, but also shaped the way in which festivals might be run, becoming the benchmark of success for other organizers and achieving an international reputation.

It has another distinctive characteristic which is particularly pertinent to my purposes. I refer to its origins in the 1820 Settlers' Foundation and its original aim to celebrate and (re-)establish, empower, and maintain the cultural heritage of English-speaking South Africans in the face of the triple threat of Americanization, Afrikanerization, and Africanization. This cultural imperative has been softened, adapted, and broadened along the way, but it is really what has kept the festival unique and distinctive, and remains fundamental to its focus and success.

The 'colonial' quality of the Grahamstown Festival has long been primary, and in a way has shaped, coloured, and affected the reputations of all the events it hosts. 'Colonial' is not used here pejoratively to stress exploitation and subservience, but in a wider sense to refer to a sense of nostalgia rooted in a romanticized vision of the British Empire, which honours the interchange between colonizer and colonized. This notion of a romanticized and shared past has been recently rediscovered and much exploited in a tourism-conscious and 'open' new South Africa. Everyone, from advertising agencies to President Thabo Mbeki with his 'African Renaissance', talk about it, while it is also addressed in numerous and wide-ranging debates on Euro/Afrocentrism, racism, slavery, reparation, land-invasions, economic dependency and growth, cultural identity, and language.

Similar points can be made about the many other festivals which have followed over the intervening years, each of them having some socio-cultural focus of importance. An important comparable example must be

the KKNK at Oudtshoorn and its linked regional festivals.

The Eventification of Afrikaans Culture

The Afrikaans-language festivals arose during what one could term the new 'language struggle' of the 1990s, when the Afrikaans-speaking population began to fear the extinction of its language and culture under the ANC-led 'new South Africa' and its preference for English as a lingua franca for the country. (This of course echoes the reaction of the English-speaking population to the perceived oppression of English by the ruling Nationalist Party's drive to impose Afrikaans in the period from 1950 to 1976.)

Besides the KKNK, the Afrikaans festivals include the Aardklop Festival (Throbbing Earth Festival) in Potchefstroom, the Afrikaanse Woordfees (Afrikaans Word Festival) in Stellenbosch, the Gariiep Fees (Gariiep Festival) in Kimberley, and the Suidooster Fees (South Easter Festival) in Bellville, near Cape Town. Once more the original impetus is the need to celebrate, (re-)establish, empower, and maintain the cultural heritage of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans in the face of the now diminished official status of Afrikaans from a co-national language with English to one of nine 'national languages', and the triple threat of potential Americanization, Anglicization, and Africanization.

Certainly in this respect the sequence of linked Afrikaans festivals has now become a major factor in the process of creating, displaying, and eventifying Afrikaans plays and the creation of a new expanded canon of Afrikaans writing. In and of themselves they also constitute events which seek to celebrate that culture in all its diversity.

The KKNK was the first such festival to be established, and had as its express purpose the promotion of the Afrikaans language and culture. To achieve this, it was conceived as a distinctive theatrical event meant to express, display, and communicate a particular vision of the Afrikaans and 'Afrikaner' cultural context to the public at large, directly and indirectly.¹⁰ Its example opened up the way for the Aardklop Festival, which seeks to

emulate the work of the KKNK in the northern provinces, as well as for the other festivals mentioned above, all of which have been strongly supported by such Afrikaans cultural organizations as the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organizations and the Afrikaanse Language and Culture Association, as also by cultural and political leaders and the Afrikaans media and other businesses (notably, the huge conglomerate of Naspers and Media 24).

To study this phenomenon more closely it is important to focus on one particular festival as a case study, using extensive excerpts from two review-reports published at the time to reflect my somewhat informal and journalistic personal responses to the festival event in question.¹¹

The KKNK Festival 2001

More than eighty productions of plays and cabarets were featured on the main programme of the festival alone, of which about fifty were new works being launched there for the first time. In addition, there were many productions on the festival fringe. The main festival included the highly controversial and somewhat incomprehensible political satire *Die Toneelstuk (The Play)* by the poet Breyten Breytenbach, directed by the provocative Marthinus Basson; Deon Opperman's lavish musical extravaganza *Vere (Feathers)*, the most hyped play of the Oudtshoorn 'season'; Jan Ellis's sombre and deceptively titled *Wyn (Wine)*; Ryk Hattingh's haunting *Eensnaar (One String)*; and David Kramer's triumphant first appearance at the festival with his two modest but award-winning works *Karoo Kitaar Blues* and *Die Ballade van Koos Sas (The Ballad of Koos Sas)*. In most cases, the shared element was an awareness of memory and history – with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the 'unmanning' of the white male, the Anglo-Boer war, and the redefinition of the notion of Afrikaner as leitmotifs.

Cultural-political debates have been a regular feature of the festival, and the 2001 popular and well-attended series focused on the future of Afrikaans, with Afrikaner pitted

against Afrikaner/Afrikaans-speaking South African. Stylistically it is also significant that verbal performance – verse, narratives, jokes, chat-shows, lieder and folk-songs, debates, plays dripping with dialogue – still dominates Afrikaans theatre, where plays are more likely to be based on formally written texts rather than on improvisation. This is distinctly different from the more physical, non-verbal, improvisational work generally on show at the English-language festivals. And it makes sense, of course, if you think of the festival as a celebration of the Afrikaans language, the Afrikaans *word*.

Both these trends are firmly rooted in the history of the Afrikaans language and culture in which the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Dutch traditions of the *Rederykerskamers*, with their emphasis on education and moral uplift rather than entertainment, played a seminal role. Out of them evolved such various local organizations as debating societies, church choirs, and amateur dramatic societies, all retaining a conservative attachment to the educational value of the arts and to the role they play in the establishment and development of the Afrikaans language and culture.

While much of the educational imperative has gradually worn away over the past century, some of the conservatism has remained, and the Afrikaans-speaking writers and directors have not been naturally drawn to the non-verbal, improvisational, and experimental work produced by the rest of the population under the influence of innovators in Europe and America. Most Afrikaans writers still prefer writing their own texts, exerting precise control over theme, plot, and presentation. There has always been a strong concern for dialectal differences, for particular regional sounds and rhythms, and the cadences of the spoken language.

A number of the works already mentioned did not do well away from the festival venues, while others had a remarkable life, notably Marie Kruger and Abduragman Adams's *Skrêmbuid Eggs vir Nasiebrou (Scrambled Eggs for Nation Brewing/Messing Up)*, David Kramer's *Karoo Kitaar Blues* (with untutored musician/labourers from the far

reaches of the semi-desert Karoo region), Chris Vorster's *Bal en Klou* (*Ball and Claw*), Pieter Fourie's *Boetman is die Bliksem in* (*Boetman is the Hell-In*), and Ryk Hattingh's *Eensnaar* (*One String*). The fact is that in the cities the cabarets and revues just seem to be more popular.

This raises another question: is there something like a 'festival play' which is acceptable in Grahamstown, Oudtshoorn, Potchefstroom, and so on, only during the festival? Certainly audiences behave differently at this festival, readily walking out if they do not like something – to the dismay of performers and 'regulars'. Clearly they are drawn from a much wider catchment area than a city theatre audience, coming to the Karoo town from across the country, from farms and small towns as well as cities, and from all walks of life.

The festival appears to be a total experience for many, who have wide-ranging but specific expectations of the programme and the setting. They love the controversies – flocking to get tickets for the Breytenbach show, or to shows displaying risqué posters. At the same time, they are easily bored, upset, or disgusted (or at least make a grandstand show of pretending to be so), and are without reserve in displaying disapproval.

Sociology of the Festival Audience

There is an entertaining sociology of the festival audience yet to be written, and the most controversial play of 2001, Breytenbach's *Die Toneelstuk*, would make a good case study. The text offers a postmodernist exploration of the role of the politicized artist in society (loosely based on the parallels between the life of Dostoevsky and the author's own life), touching on issues of trauma, self-castigation, and *angst*, and utilizing intertextual references to a vast range of international literary works, including many of Breytenbach's own poems, paintings, and novels.

The production made use of a stark, abstract set and symbolic figures alongside those of human scale. A woman (Antoinette Kellerman) played the role of the frustrated male director in the process of trying to

direct a play that did not yet exist (remarkably impersonating the real director, Basson). A variety of mutilated figures represented the poet. The design strongly recalled the poet's own graphic works (which are not well known in South Africa, but were at one time very popular in France, where he lives). A dense, highly symbolic, non-linear, non-narrative, and often extremely vulgar text was woven in sublime poetic language and presented in a visually arresting form by a superb director and cast. Indeed, director and designer Marthinus Basson referred to it at one stage as a seminal text in the history of the new Afrikaans theatre (although this sentiment was not widely shared by critics), and his product certainly caused a great deal of spirited debate.

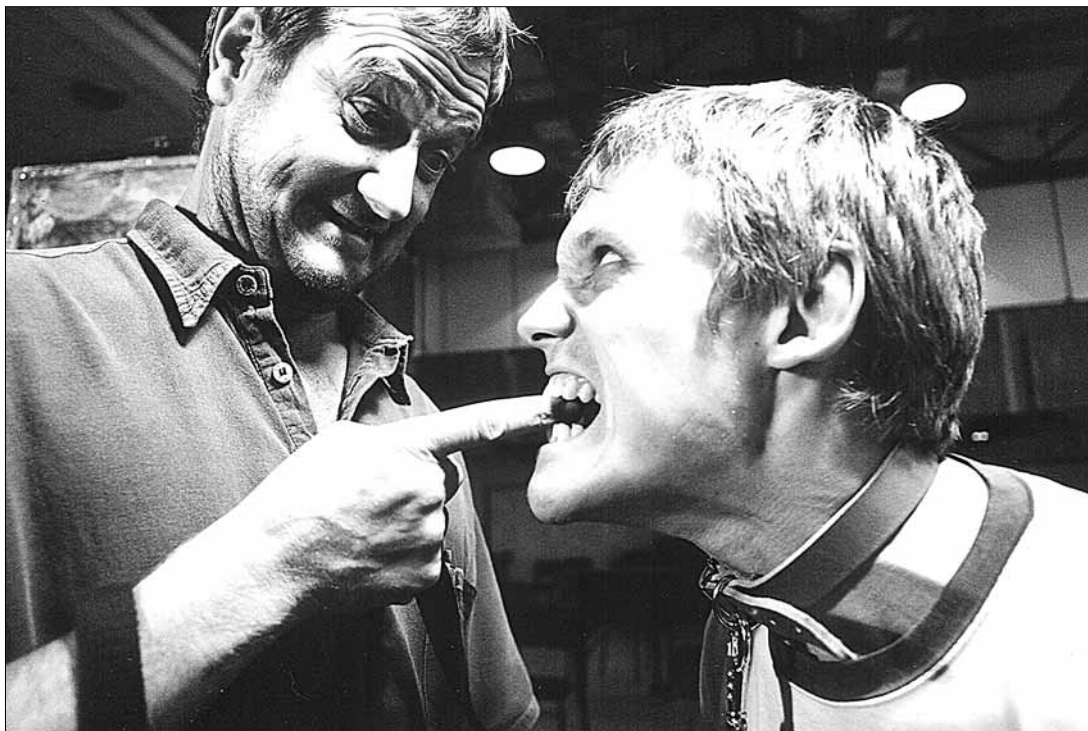
This was clearly not a run-of-the-mill 'popular' play and, given the track records of both writer and director as agents provocateurs in the arts, everyone knew what they were letting themselves in for, which was an evening of shocked incomprehension and confrontation intermingled with visual and verbal magic. The houses were packed and every night people got up and walked out during the course of the show. The director felt affronted, as did Breytenbach, and they both said so. They felt that the audience had no sense of theatre etiquette – a reaction clearly based on their experiences of European and metropolitan South African audiences, not on the realities of festival culture.

However, theatre is a speculative process at best, and festival audiences are not normally 'sophisticated' theatre audiences, but people out for fun. Audiences must surely feel that, since they have paid for their tickets (exorbitantly in some cases), they have a right to attend the play, but they also have a right to walk out if they wish, or if they feel they are being patronized, offended, or insulted.

The Oudtshoorn Festival attracts many white Afrikaans-speaking and some English-speaking patrons, but is not yet much patronized by black speakers of African languages. When one considers conventions of theatre attendance and response in urban and rural black performance, the mind boggles at what



Martiens Basson's production of Breyten Breytenbach's *Die Toneelstuk* (2001), an incomprehensible and unsettling postmodern journey into the mind of the poet and artist Dawid, portrayed by Jan Ellis (in the background above). Also above: Antoinette Kellerman (right) as Martiens (Marthinus Basson), the director of the play, with Anton Smuts (Baba Halfjan). Below: Albert Maritz as the Warder and physical theatre performer Rob van Vuuren as the Dog. Negative public reaction to the production's explicit violence, sexual references, profanity, and political aggression tended to overshadow the poetry and profundity of a complex and intensely literary text. Photos: Marthinus Basson.



the reactions might have been if the audiences were less homogeneously Afrikaans.

In addition there were, as always, the bazaar, partying, and socializing occasions which seem to dominate at all festivals. To the dismay of some cultural aficionados and theatre-lovers, there seem to be thousands of people who come to the festivals for the party, *not* the culture. They may attend a pop concert or go to the ever-popular *Kaktus op die Vlakte*, but for the rest, they cruise the streets, stalls, restaurants, wine-tasting booths, and pubs.¹² Then there are those who apparently come for their annual fix, attending everything in 'shop-till-you-drop' mode, and absorbing it wholesale fashion, possibly to last them the rest of the year.

But, again, this is neither unusual for festivals nor limited to the Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. What then is distinctive and different about the Afrikaans festival? The answer does not lie so much in the content of the shows or the stalls as in what takes place in the streets, pubs, food tents, wine stalls, restaurants, and camping sites, where everyone talks, jokes, argues in his or her version of Afrikaans. The common denominator in Oudtshoorn is not culture, nor even the somewhat conservative, wordy Afrikaans theatre. It is something more pervasive. It is *Die Taal* ('The Language'), the youngest language in the world – Afrikaans as spoken, *krom en skeef*, in all its varied forms, throughout the country.¹³

The topics of discussion may be politics, culture, plays, concerts, art, controversy, wine, food, the weather, sex, and so forth; it does not really matter. The festival is another kind of country – a vibrant space where English and other languages are tolerated (some plays are even in English and actually well supported). But Afrikaans is alive – enthusiastically used, relished, and celebrated. For the time being, apparently, the new Southern African context is seen as a challenge to be confronted and even embraced.

The KKNK Festival 2003

I attended the 2003 Little Karoo National Arts Festival on an impulse, a whim brought

on by an excited last-minute phone call from my friend Jan Vorster, a retired academic with a restless and inquisitive spirit and time on his hands.

He had reserved our accommodation, so I booked our theatre tickets before setting off. This is something you have to do, for the good shows are usually sold out months in advance. As it was, we missed one or two of the major presentations, and also failed to see *Kaktus op die Vlakte* and some other open-air musical extravaganzas which fell outside the period of our visit.

Since Jan is a man who clearly appreciates the basics, we stopped en route to stock up on wine, an essential precaution against such unforeseen eventualities as snakebite, an overdose of *boeremusiek* (Afrikaans country music), boredom, bad theatre, late-night anxieties, and the outrageous festival prices of basic foodstuffs. We reached Oudtshoorn just in time to get my press kit from the festival office and make it to our two o'clock show.

After the show we headed to our accommodation on the edge of town, an austere but functional room in a wing of the army infirmary. Extremely basic, but really affordable and functional, it was conveniently placed and safe. Fortunately festivals are enormously exhausting affairs, so all we did in the room was to hit the bed and sleep. All in all, it was a bargain at the price. Even more so was the huge breakfast, taken in the equally sparse Officers' Mess, a lovely surprise awaiting us in the morning.

The provision of accommodation and food are of course two sources of real income and job creation for the inhabitants, and the locals are not going to let slip the opportunity of fleecing you to the bone – an opportunity which only comes along once a year, and then only for a week. So every hostel, garden cottage, spare room, garage, toolshed, garden shed, and caravan are converted into 'charming rooms for rent', with breakfast included (another gamble, for this could set you up for the day or barely keep you going for an hour). All are set on making the most of their week of opportunity, and for this you pay premium rates.

One of the favourite events of every KKNK festival, *Kaktus op die Vlakte* is the annual big bash in the park where many Afrikaans rock soloists and bands perform new Afrikaans (and some English) music to tremendous acclaim. Since the 1980s popular music has become symbolic of a vast transformation in the Afrikaans-speaking culture of the country. The rock legend Johannes Kerkorrel, his untimely death commemorated with a haunting exhibition at the 2003 festival, used to perform here. Photo: Temple Hauptfleisch.



Furthermore, not only do you pay in South African rands, but you are also expected to pay in kind by sharing your experiences of the festival with your hosts and any other individuals who happen to share your lodgings, who are so busy running a temporary B & B establishment, carrying on with their daily lives, and sharing their opinions of you with their neighbours, that they have no time to sample the festival fare themselves. You are their source of culture.

I have made some light fun of it all, but the fact remains that there is a serious and effective capitalist substructure in place at the base of the accommodation issue: supply and demand governs all the festival activities, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the need to find places for the more than 30,000 people who descend on the town for the duration. The same is true of other towns hosting large festivals – Grahamstown, Potchefstroom, Kimberley, Bloemfontein, and so on. And most people do it well.

Having unpacked, we both collapsed onto our narrow iron bedsteads for a brief nap and a serious planning session of our culture and entertainment for the week. We pored over the thick programme comprising 112 pages, which claimed to offer an astounding list of 839 performances and 38 art exhibitions, trying to fit in play attendance with meals, exhibitions, and lounging around at the free open-air productions, pubs, buskers, and the rest, while leaving at least a little time to drink our wine, socialize, and even get some sleep.

The organizers do their very best to help you fit it all in, offering all kinds of schematizations of their material, scheduling plays on the hour as much as possible. However, they cannot prevent live shows from running the full length of the hour and sometimes overrunning, which leads to a lot of late-coming and early departures. All of this gives rise to the slight sense of hysteria which seems to have become a feature of most large festivals, and also affects what may be loosely termed the 'etiquette of theatregoing'. There appears to be a belief that you disturb no one if you come in late, talk loudly, eat chips, send SMS messages, read your programme, and so on, during the show. All this has been exacerbated in the past few years by TV culture, and additionally promoted in South Africa by what has been seen as the rather frightening informality tolerated by the non-mainstream theatre in the old apartheid 'townships' and rural areas.

As South African society opened up after 1990, these everyday social conventions began to come together at the festivals. Nevertheless, we still have some way to go before the conflicting demands of a participatory African oral culture, the TV generation, and the demands of reactionary formal theatre practice (sit, shut up, remain seated till the end of the play), as inherited from the imported and dominant colonial culture, will blend into something like an accepted South African style.

For the moment, the situation is the source of much rancour and confusion. And key to

it must be the very premise that contemporary South African festivals are based on – the idea of art for the people. In other words, the festivals are for everybody, whatever their age, sex, race, language, value systems, religion, sexual orientation, social and educational status, and theatrical and cultural traditions. The nature, demands, and impact of festival audiences, and their status as client and role-player, are clearly among the key areas to be looked at in any proper study of the festival phenomenon.

Rested, Jan and I found the streets of the large Karoo town ringing with competing music and laughter, and every public space awash with stalls, advertisements, watering holes and eating places (none more competitive than those run by the many official sponsors, juggling for advertising space, pressing free samples and competition forms on you, dragging you into their tents to view their goods, and so on). The whole town, blanketed by a cloud of wood smoke, smelt tantalizingly of *braaivleis* (barbecue) and curry.

Following the crowd, we found a seat with a view at an open-air beer garden on the strategic corner of Baron van Reede and Voortrekker Streets. This was a people-watcher's heaven, opposite three of the main venues of the festival, from which we could watch the event unfold. People and cars milled about us, while posters, caravans, tents, and stalls were crammed in everywhere. From the discussions around us, we deduced that almost every second house in the town had apparently become a temporary bed-and-breakfast establishment and the town was bursting at its seams.

A family at the next table, locals, told us that they came down simply to view the madness. We got a running commentary from them on the impact of these crowds on the town: how prices sky-rocketed (they had prepared themselves by stocking up groceries, for example), how parking had disappeared, how crime increased in the town centre but dropped off in the surrounding suburbs as criminals headed for the prime 'business spot' where the tourists and festival visitors were. As for the drunk-and-disorderly lot, why drink in a shebeen or at home if there

are open pubs on the streets to enjoy? Then the police can take you home.

I was a little sceptical about this latter point, but the next day I saw one such very far-gone reveller being encouraged into a police van by his friends and family, under the indulgent eye of the two constables – a far cry from the anger and violence accompanying such scenes in high-apartheid days. It began to dawn on me that festivals might actually affect far more than the artists, the economy, and people's cultural perceptions. This thought was going to grow over the days.

In the course of our sojourn we saw and discussed a number of shows. This was a theatre festival, after all, so I had to do some work, and to do it we went to some strange and far-flung venues not necessarily well-equipped for such activities. While we all realize that this is part of the 'informality' of a rural festival, the lack of facilities seems to have generated a little more acrimony of late. As the battle to establish themselves in the context of so many major festivals continues, companies and performers increasingly expect better sound and lighting equipment, more lights, more technical assistance, and so on, while audiences, too, occasionally call for more comfort, improved sightlines, and air-conditioning. There is an element of irrationality in some of these demands, for they do not take into account the temporary and ad hoc nature of most festivals. It seems that in some cases the commercial factor is becoming dominant, giving rise to the claim that organizers are trying to put too many productions into the venues, allowing too little get-in time, and providing insufficient and under-trained support staff. If true, this would be a dangerous and debilitating trend.

Something for Everyone

On offer among the 'big' shows was much impressive and thought-provoking work, and the fringe and musical venues offered excellent entertainment, although many of the shows were clearly stock productions or repeats. But there were many competent productions on the programme and much that



Above: it pays to advertise. As the streets of the Karoo town Oudtshoorn fill with festival-goers every empty space becomes a venue and every shopfront and wall becomes a billboard. Below: welcome to Oudtshoorn! The central gathering point of visitors to the KKNK festival at the corner of Baron van Reede and Voortrekker Streets, drawn there by the sound of bands playing and the aggressive marketing of key sponsors. Photos: Temple Hauptfleisch.



was fun, but nothing truly exceptional. In fact, the festival somehow appeared a rather bland affair, with none of the *Sturm und Drang*, excitement, public debate, and disgust or outrage associated with the event in 2001 and 2002. This may have been because so many of the key issues in the Afrikaner consciousness (the threat to the language, the need to engage with Africa, the need to confront latent racism and discrimination), had already been dealt with, and the lessening of the fear that, with the election of 1994, we might be heading for the first government in which the Afrikaner had completely lost a political voice. Or it may simply be that, with a younger generation of artists and audiences coming along, the tendency is to see festivals as a place to enjoy oneself, or to work and earn money.

Such an impression was supported by the sheer energy on the public stages, especially the packed Radio Sonder Grense ('Radio Without Limits') stage in front of the main buildings, and in the ubiquitous pubs and beer gardens offering 'live music'. But as far as the plays went, it was for the most part a tame affair – which is not necessarily a negative criticism, since art need not be controversial to be good and a festival is many faceted, with something for everyone. Each person would have found *something* at the festival, whether their taste was for thought-provoking art, literature, and theatre or more relaxing entertainment (stand-up, jazz, pop music), social contacts, and good dining: it was all there in abundance.

In the end, I had to wonder at the claim of an astounding 839 shows on offer. Could this be true? I rather thought not, and eventually realized that the reference was to a tally of *performances*, not productions, the latter coming to 'only' 180 in the period. However, this is still an amazing number. Also important to note is that the notion of 'performances' was being used rather loosely in this context, referring to everything from formal plays and concerts to street events and buskers.

One of the harshest criticisms levelled at the festival in recent years (particularly by hard-core high-cultural activists) has been that it is not a cultural festival but an

'Afrikaner bazaar'.¹⁴ This is a hugely debatable point, of course, but at one level it was abundantly clear that Oudtshoorn was almost brazenly and stereotypically declaring itself to be a vast and sprawling fête or bazaar – a place for speakers of Afrikaans to feel at home, to interact, laugh, argue, philosophize, eat, drink, be merry, and engage with each other in all their variety. This first impression was substantially confirmed by our experiences during the rest of our stay, and to uncritical outsiders that quality is bound to dominate their impressions.

For others, however, the KKNK was obviously a more substantial event. This became clear from all the discussions and debates scheduled as part of the festival in a number of the performance venues, and in the more thoughtful columns of the national newspapers. Coverage is mostly limited to the predominantly Afrikaans media, all from the Media 24 stable – which defeats one of the more important aims, that of legitimizing and advancing the cause of the language and culture among the whole population.

My voyeuristic touring of the streets made me sharply aware of other motives lying somewhere between the two views outlined above, evident in the actions and enthusiasm of the citizens of the town, the performers, the sponsors, the stall-keepers, and so on. In this vast middle space there lurked a whole range of mundane motives, many of them relating simply to the day-to-day pressures of making a living or even, in some cases, of just surviving.

What Culture, and for Whom?

An important anomaly arose from my experience of the festival in 2003 that forced me to question the seeming unity of the event. While I had previously stated that one could see the 2001 festival as a unified entity, even if simply seen as an 'Afrikaner bazaar', I now began to think that the festival is *not* clearly and unambiguously a single entity, but something more complex. There is a conceptual unity to the event as a whole, for it takes place in one place, at a specific time, has one programme, and has a marketing strategy clearly

focused on Afrikaans and Afrikaans-speakers. However, within that frame is something more complex, more like a polysystem of linked *sub-festivals*, each with its own aims, objectives, supporters, processes and impact – an uneasy composite of (potentially) competing activities.¹⁵

The polysystemic nature of the festival experience seems to be a crucial factor in the festivalization process and its impact on South African theatre and culture. This is useful in understanding not only the hybrid nature of contemporary festivals, but also some of the difficulties which face any attempt to utilize the festival circuit or a specific festival for a socio-cultural purpose of any kind.

The points made above highlight two facets of my experiences at the KKNK, which have a particular bearing on the central argument so far. Indeed, they may be seen as ‘myths’ that govern much of our idealism concerning one-culture-for-all and one-festival-for-all. I would like to conclude briefly by considering these myths.

As demonstrated in the example, any festival, whatever its proclaimed and ostensible focus and aims, is clearly and inevitably a complex occasion. It is perceived (and often marketed) as a single unitary event (‘the festival’), even an event with one central aim such as ‘the promotion of Afrikaans culture’, yet it consists of a polysystem of separate – often clashing – subordinate events (such as displays, speeches, plays, musical performances, market stalls, parades, and debates) at a variety of levels (of complexity, artistry, profundity, and commercialization), all tied together by a media-driven set of overarching values and aims that seek to sell it as a larger, more integrated unit which, in some cases at least, provides each festival with its own unique character.

If this is the model of a festival, there are a number of questions that could be asked. First: if a festival represents a culture (or expresses a cultural identity – Afrikaans, South African English, Xhosa, Tamil, or whatever), what is that culture? Is it a single culture, with distinctive features?

Second: what does such a culture consist of? Just speaking of the arts, can it contain

both classical music and pop? Classical plays from the received western canon, contemporary Afrikaans works, African-style performance pieces, and all the variations and mixes thereof? Thematically speaking, can it encompass all points of view and all issues without becoming fractured – for example, Christian versus Islamic values, conservative versus liberal points of view, gay versus straight issues, and the (co-)existence of ‘white’ versus ‘coloured’ Afrikaners?

And what unifies all this? Or is the point of a modern (rainbow) culture precisely that it is eclectic and receptive to a variety of forms and influences? Is there such a thing as a (single) Afrikaans culture? It appears not; and yet, there is a sense in which people who speak Afrikaans are drawn together around activities they share, such as music, art, theatre, film, sport, food, drink, dance – and festivals.

Is there such a thing as a (single) rainbow culture? In terms of the dominant theme of this discussion, the Afrikaans culture is but one of many strands in the rainbow of the South African cultural identity. But it is also true that the rainbow cannot exist if the various bands in its spectrum are not secure in their own identity. Perhaps much of what has made the country recover and grow over the past decade has to do with its ability to recognize, accept (or tolerate), and use the differences that it previously feared and despised. This openness and tolerance are pre-eminently on display at the various festivals.

The Politics of Cultural ‘Ownership’

The second point to be emphasized concerns the formidable constraints on the organizers of festivals, which are directly linked to the cultural politics and cultural economics of the event. This may have a most decisive impact on the ability of the organizers (or anyone else) to use the festival in a coherent fashion to shape artistic and cultural identity.

In addition to the primary levels of complexity, as outlined, the same multi-faceted social, cultural, political, and economic polysystem has a variety of dynamic forces which drive it and shape the particular events, all

ultimately vying for supremacy and 'ownership' of the festival as a whole. This may be illustrated with a simple diagram.¹⁶



What we have here are some of the possible factors which may have a distinct influence on decision-making in the festivals and how they are put into effect. The diagram seems to suggest that controlling the aim and focus of a festival as an eventifying process is made immensely difficult because of the strong potential for disagreement and disunity between the various forces if they are unequally balanced. Conversely, there can be an equally strong potential for success if the central focus (represented by the star) is maintained and served in such a way as to mobilize all the constituent elements in one event.

In this respect it is possible to identify three qualities which seem to play vital roles in the processes taking place in South Africa at present:

first, each festival is subject to all these forces, although they may not carry equal weight in the processes or have an equal impact on a particular festival. It is a fact that no festival can take place without (voluntary or forced) co-operation between all the above-mentioned forces and, as a result of this participation, each one of these forces has both rights and privileges in terms of the total event. It cannot be argued, for example, that the town in which a festival takes place

has no say in the nature of the festival, nor that its citizens, business people, moral and political leaders and other interested parties are powerless to influence the run of things. By the same token, the town cannot argue that national sponsors, such as a soft drinks or media company, have no say in the contents of the programme. Much of the current rancour about the festivals arises from this point.

second, the forces listed are all present, but they have a particular relationship to each other, and, depending on the nature of the particular festival, the weight they carry varies from festival to festival. It is in fact the weight carried by the individual forces and the power relationship between them in the festival that determine the core nature of that particular event. One could also view it the other way round: the specific nature of the festival determines the weight and relationship between the various participants and forces involved in the festival or event. To illustrate this point broadly, one need only take a comparative look at contrasting festivals, say the KKNK and the Grahamstown Festival.

third, given its structure, every festival has, of necessity, multiple aims and expectations of which local expectations regarding publicity, tourism, job creation, the generation of income, and the cultural development of the local populace would normally have precedence. This means that no single festival can be a representation (or clone) of the abstract (metropolitan) cultural industry, for it is strongly rooted in its local identity. A festival in Bloemfontein, for example, would be primarily an expression of values and expectations held by Bloemfontein residents, and would differ substantially from a similar festival in Grahamstown, Pretoria, or Durban, even if the plays staged were the same. The nature of the particular festival as *event* is unique. And this would be equally true, one suspects, of festivals in Edinburgh, London, Sydney, New York, Salzburg, or Prague.

Given these forces, it becomes a matter of great difficulty for any organizer or organiz-

ation really to control a festival and maintain a focus on the central aim. This is demonstrated by the programmes of the various festivals. For example, Afrikaans productions were to be found at the Grahamstown Festival from the early years, despite the latter's ostensible aim of promoting English culture. Vice versa, there are many English (or multilingual) productions at Afrikaans festivals, despite their clear focus on promoting Afrikaans culture through the Afrikaans language). Yet none of the festivals has lost its impact in its chosen field. They simply do not control the fields, but appear to me to be controlled by the fields, which, given the way language and culture is made, may not be a bad thing at all.

The fact is that a festival must ultimately be true to its basic nature as a spontaneous festive or celebratory event. As Willmar Sauter points out, the fundamental origins of the festival lie in the existence of a playing culture and the nature of the particular playing culture will determine (or at least significantly affect) the way an individual festival originates and is run.¹⁷ To participate in a festival means to laugh, sing, and party, as one would at a bazaar or fête, for it is a gathering of people with shared interests. If they share similar values (regarding arts, culture, language, religion, and so on), so much the better. How such an event will be managed and used by people, organizations and structures is something they cannot wholly control, for the festival is driven by the imperatives arising from the inherent 'playfulness' of the playing culture from which it arises, and therefore much of what takes place cannot to be planned or managed.¹⁸ It simply happens, as does life.

The fact that significant art is made and/or offered at most festivals, that people have memorable aesthetic experiences, that the nature and quality of art and cultural products are debated, and so on, makes for exceptional and highly valued moments, but is not the norm – not something anyone can really predict, plan, or manage. The only thing any manager of a festival with all his/her consultants, boards, advisers, sponsors, and support staff can really do is to create the

opportunity for people to play by bringing together the players and the audiences in a festive space.

Notes and References

1. Much has been written about theatre as a weapon in the struggle over the years. See, for example, Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman, *South African Theatre: Four Plays and an Introduction* (Pretoria: HAUM Educational, 1984); David Coplan, *In Township Tonight! South Africa's Black City Music and Theatre* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press; London: Longman, 1985); Robert Kavanagh, *Theatre and Cultural Struggle in South Africa* (London: Zed Books, 1985); Ian Steadman, *Drama and Social Consciousness: Themes in Black Theatre on the Witwatersrand until 1985* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1985); Peter Larlham, *Black Theater, Dance, and Ritual in South Africa* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985); Martin Orkin, *Drama and the South African State* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1991); Liz Gunner, ed., *Politics and Performance: Theatre, Poetry, and Song in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994); Temple Hauptfleisch, *Theatre and Society in South Africa: Reflections in a Fractured Mirror* (Pretoria: J. L. van Schaik, 1997); and Loren Kruger, *The Drama of South Africa: Plays, Pageants, and Publics since 1910* (London: Routledge, 1999).

2. I first came across the useful concept and term *festivalisering* in Michael Kamp's 2003 dissertation at the University of Amsterdam, where he quotes Paul Kaptein's 1996 article 'De beginperiode van het Holland Festival: Festivals en festivalisering', in R. L. Erenstein, ed., *Een theater geschiedenis de Nederlanden* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), p. 672–80. I have translated it as *festivalization*.

3. Both Hauptfleisch, op cit., and Kruger, op. cit., provide general discussions and further references on these processes.

4. A point well illustrated by Paul Kaptein in the article cited in Note 2, above.

5. This estimate is based on the most recent statistics available, which are contained in the national *Arts and Culture Database* compiled by NACSA (August 2004). This lists 83 festivals and festival-like events of all kinds (many having little or no 'arts' or 'theatre' content, of course). However it is still incomplete, not reflecting such important arts festivals as the Afrikaanse Woordfees ('Afrikaans Word Festival'), the Kalfiefees ('Calf Festival'), the Volksbladfees ('Volksblad Festival'), the Suidooster Fees ('South Easter Festival'), and presumably many others. A complete count would more likely be closer to 100. A slightly earlier attempt to list the festivals was undertaken by Michael Kamp in 2003, when he undertook a survey of the festivals utilizing the *Arts and Culture Handbook*, ed. Mike van Graan and Nicky du Plessis (Cape Town: Article 27 Arts and Culture Consultants, 1997/8; Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002–3) to list and categorize for the two periods. See his thesis, *Festivalisering: Een culturele stem van het Zuid-Afrika van vandaag: in een politieke, economische, culturele en kunsten context* (unpublished Master's dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 2003), Appendixes VI and VII.

6. There are many issues, of course, but much of the discussion and a number of the key complaints and points of criticism have appeared and been argued in the popular press. Two very useful internet-based forums on South African arts, namely *LitNet* and *Artslink*, have both carried open debates on the matter of festivals in recent times. In addition, every issue of the *South African Theatre Journal* also has a more academic review of one or more of the festivals. Particularly interesting in this regard is Herman Kitshoff's review 'Claiming Cultural Festivals: Playing for Power at the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK)' in *South African Theatre Journal*, XVIII, 2004. Two others, also from *SATJ*, are referred to later in this article.

7. Think of it in these terms: each new play usually only has three to five performances at a festival, and most companies play about three to five festivals a year. Even if these are supplemented by runs in smaller festivals and the particular company's home base (for example, Stellenbosch, Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Durban, Pretoria, or Johannesburg), one is talking of no more than 50 to 70 performances a year. There are outstanding exceptions, of course, of plays which become public favourites and have a long and profitable life – and this is the dream of every company, surely. However, the majority of plays live for no more than ten or fifteen performances.

8. *Eventification* refers to the process by which the theatrical *performance* – viewed as a normal human activity and socio-cultural process – is turned into a socio-cultural *event*. By framing a particular happening or event as something of social, cultural, political, or other significance, the event becomes a powerful means for framing and confronting the past, the present, and the future. And festivals are one of the most powerful eventifying mechanisms available today.

The terms *eventify* and *eventification* were coined in 1999 by the author in a contribution written for the IFTR Working Group on *The Theatrical Event*, then reworked for the IFTR conference in Lyon in 2000. The final article, entitled 'Eventification: Utilizing the Theatrical System to Frame the Event' was published in *Theatrical Events: Borders, Dynamics, Frames*, ed. Vicky Ann Cremona, Peter Eversmann, Hans van Maanen, Wilmar Sauter, and John Tulloch (Amsterdam: Rodopi Publishers, 2003). In this context, a life event is any social event which can be seen to have performative qualities (at a minimum, performers in a performance space before onlookers/an audience). A church service, a wedding, a baptism ceremony, a public hanging, a football match, a war, are all framed events in some way; but they are not (yet) theatrical events, though they may be framed and 'read' that way. The theories of Erving Goffman, Elizabeth Burns, Richard Schechner, and Victor Turner all utilize the notion.

9. The issues discussed here are also touched on by other writers. Among these are: August Staub, 'The Social Uses of Festival: Transformation and Disfiguration', *South African Theatre Journal*, VI, No. 1, p. 4–24; Loren Kruger, op. cit.; Jacqueline Martin et al., in Cremona, Eversmann, Van Maanen, Sauter, and Tulloch, op. cit., p. 91–110; and Peter Merrington, 'The "New Pageantry" and Performance Studies', unpublished paper read at the SASTR Conference, Stellenbosch, 11–12 September 1999.

10. The difference between 'Afrikaner' and a 'speaker of Afrikaans' (or an 'Afrikaans-speaking South African') has become somewhat problematic as the political cer-

tainties of the past have disappeared in the turbulence of the newly emerging society. Originally 'Afrikaner' was narrowly defined, limited to people sharing the political, religious, and cultural beliefs of a specific set of white South Africans who speak Afrikaans. It was this definition which lay at the heart of apartheid policies. Many more people in South Africa, however, speak Afrikaans as a mother tongue or second language, and utilize it for cultural purposes. The new political freedom has freed the language as well, and the Afrikaans festivals are trying to make space for the whole spectrum of Afrikaans cultural expression.

11. The reviews utilized here are 'The Eventification of Afrikaans Culture: Some Thoughts on the Klein Karoo National Arts Festival', *South African Theatre Journal*, XVI (2001); and 'The Cultural Bazaar: Thoughts on Festival Culture after a Visit to the 2003 Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK) in Oudtshoorn', *South African Theatre Journal*, XVII, 2003. They have been slightly shortened and adapted for this article, and are published with permission of the editors and publishers of *SATJ*.

12. *Kaktus op die Vlaktes* is an annual pop show of popular Afrikaans bands, songs, and songwriters. Literally translated it means 'Cactus on the Plains', but is a rather crude joke since the root word of *Kaktus* (*Kak*) means 'shit' in Afrikaans.

13. *Krom en skeef* is an Afrikaans expression, which literally means 'bent and skewed'.

14. See, for example, Herman Kitshoff's article 'Claiming Cultural Festivals: Playing for Power at the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (KKNK)', and his review of the 2003 KKNK festival in the *South African Theatre Journal*, XVIII (2004), p. 64–80 and 235–9; and Hanlie Stander's review article, 'Die ABC van die KKNK is dat dit 'n groot F is' ('The ABC of the KKNK is that it is a Big F'), in *Rapport*, 6 April 2004, p. 3.

15. The useful notion of the polysystem was developed by Itamar Even-Zohar. It basically takes classical systems theory and suggests that in some cases one may have a larger system consisting of a subset of interlocking and linked smaller subsystems. The example used there is that of the literary system, the term 'polysystem' being coined for the larger system. This works well if one considers the processes of theatre making and production, and seems helpful in understanding the complex and multi-dimensional nature of the festival as a theatrical event. For more on Even-Zohar's ideas see, for example, 'Polysystem Theory' in *Poetics Today*, 1 (1979).

16. This generic model is an adaptation and application of a model created by economist Nic Terblanche in a discussion of the stakeholders of a performing arts organization. See his 'The Performing Arts and Selected Relationship Marketing Strategies', *South African Theatre Journal*, XVIII (2004), p. 8–29.

17. 'Introducing the Theatrical Event', in Cremona, Eversmann, Van Maanen, Sauter, and Tulloch, op. cit., p. 3–14.

18. This facet has its irritating problems which reinforce the argument: if beer and a *braai* (a South African 'barbecue') is typical of a region, how can one expect it not to become part of the festivities of a local festival? If the festival is patronized by many teenagers, how can one escape the pop concerts and discotheques? If the festivalgoers are drawn from people whose normal pleasures consist of watching sport and TV, how can they be expected to possess the theatre etiquette habitual to the urban theatregoer?