

IN SEARCH OF THE RAINBOW: THE LITTLE KAROO NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL AND THE SEARCH FOR CULTURAL IDENTITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION

As South Africa emerged from the trauma of enforced racial and cultural fragmentation under British rule and the apartheid regime in 1990, it set about rebuilding the country and seeking a sense of cultural unity. This desire is wonderfully rendered by Archbishop Desmond Tutu's image of 'the rainbow children of God', and the notion of the 'rainbow nation', expressing the idea of unity within diversity. This is, however, also difficult to achieve in a country with 11 official languages, representative of a range of political, social, cultural, artistic, religious, economic and other value systems, and a fraught and tumultuous history which left people scarred and deeply suspicious. The very notion of 'one nation' and the processes (and feasibility) of 'nation building' have indeed engaged the attention of philosophers, linguists, sociologists, theologians, politicians, strategists *et al.* for the past decade or more.

In South Africa the arts have often been mobilised for socio-political ends, most notably as tools (or weapons) in the battle against apartheid. During the so-called 'cultural struggle' (1971-1986), for instance, the *eventifying* power of the performing arts was *consciously* employed to shift perceptions, highlight injustices and confront realities¹. After 1994, with the country facing an enormous task of reconstruction, reconciliation and self-realization, the arts (in the very broadest sense) have once more been invoked for a new 'cultural struggle', one in which not only the theatrical event, but the *theatrical system* as a whole is becoming increasingly important as a means of understanding and re-interpreting the past, coming to grips with the present and shaping the future, and thus in shifting perceptions across a wide spectrum and the many chasms that divide people and communities. And in this respect, the festival culture is of particular interest.

THE FESTIVALISATION OF SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE²

As one may see from the introduction and other chapters in this book, the *festival* has always been a distinctive phenomenon in the history of humankind, closely related to the religious, artistic and cultural life of a particular community. This is also true among the numerous peoples and cultures of the Southern African region.

A key factor in the rise of festivals in South Africa is the post-1970 theatre, when artists utilised various forms of performance, combining 'African', 'European', 'American', 'Eastern' and other forms to create the somewhat unique hybrid (or syncretic) theatre and performance forms of the 1980s and 1990s. This period happened to coincide with the gradual rediscovery, reintroduction and/or expansion of the role of the arts festival internationally (Kaptein 1996), and thus a re-evaluation and re-discovery of festivals as important cultural drivers. (Hence, for instance, this book.) These processes have left their mark on the new South Africa as well. Beginning with a few prominent festivals in the 1970-1980 period, and then escalating remarkably in the 1990s under the influence of the reconciliation processes set in motion by Nelson Mandela and so brilliantly displayed in the boldly multicultural, and crossover concert held at his inauguration as first President of the 'new South Africa' in 1994 (Hauptfleisch 1997; Kruger 1999).

By 1994 festivals had become a prominent feature of theatre in South Africa, the number of festivals growing in bewildering fashion. An estimate points to a festival circuit of more than 140 annual festivals in 2004 – though not all are really 'arts and culture' festivals, of course, and there is a great deal of flux in the numbers from year to year.³ While the aims and intentions of festivals differ, many seem to be striving toward some kind of cultural identity and/or cohesion – whether we are talking about the continuation or resurrection of old and established 'traditional' (also indigenous) practices or newly created (custom-made) enterprises.

The practical reasons for this proliferation are manifold and complex, but the collapse of the old, focused and wealthy state-funded theatre subsidy system, the disappearance of the 'cultural struggle' support for anti-apartheid theatre, and the rise of a predominantly freelance theatre industry have been important. So too the commercial success of the original *Grahamstown Festival* (or *Standard Bank National Arts Festival* as it is officially known), demonstrating the

strategic potential festivals may have for boosting local industry, tourism, solidarity and prestige. Besides the 'pure' art and culture festivals, numerous dedicated *niche* festivals (or perhaps what Seffrin calls 'boutique festivals' in her chapter of this book), including produce festivals and food and wine festivals, have all become celebratory business enterprises.

There is a strong air of instability about this system (and a great amount of criticism and pessimism about quality and the long-term forecasts for the theatre industry), yet the festival circuit *does* ensure that many plays and productions are put on annually, and on occasions some surprisingly competent and even great works *do* emerge. This seems to suggest that there is life in the theatre industry and a future for artists and technicians. Since the South African state contributes very little direct funding towards the arts nowadays, this is of enormous value.⁴ In addition festivalisation has had a marked and varied impact on the nature of the arts themselves, affecting both the theatre as a *system* (e.g. who does it, where it takes place, how it does its business) and the content, nature and form of the work on offer.

It seems to me the festivals offer a new sense of community (or *communitas* as Lev-Aladgem calls it) – particularly in previously divided settings – in a way reviving three venerable South African traditions, all lost to 'progress' and socio-political change over the past few decades. They are the old market-day gatherings in the small towns and cities (offering social interaction and bonding within a community), celebrations linked to national and local commemorative days (from celebratory rituals linked to the history of a particular culture or region to imported and created festivals and celebratory occasions), and the touring theatre companies of the period 1880-1960 (bringing art, culture and entertainment to the people).

There are obviously a number of negative aspects to the festival circuit as well, such as the diminution of the metropolitan theatre culture (most of the festivals are short-term events in outlying towns, instead of the longer runs of plays in a permanent season in cities), a loss of cultural memory (as a result of the expense and difficulty of doing the classic works, also of the South African canon, the high royalties charged by international playwrights, and the demand for new, relevant work for the new South African audiences), and the lack of job security for theatre practitioners in an event-driven theatre circuit.⁵ However, by and large, the circuit of festivals has become a

remarkable phenomenon which has enormous potential for local tourism and the distribution of culture and cultural values.

FESTIVALS AS EVENTIFYING SYSTEMS

As shown above, South African theatre is today *dominated* by festivals to such an extent that Stephanie Nieuwoudt (2001), and many others recently, have suggested that the circuit may actually have come to represent the theatrical 'season' in South Africa. Though appearing to be a splintered and diverse season made up of a series of cultural 'mini-bytes', the festivals are where plays, performances and other arts events are effectively launched and displayed for the public today. 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. Thus, festivals are not only where the work is, they are where the artistic output of the actor, director, choreographer and others is *eventified*⁶ and where the everyday *life event*⁷ (performing a play, a concerto, a dance, exhibiting a painting, a sculpture, an installation) is turned into a significant *cultural event*, framed by the festival and made meaningful by the presence of an audience and reviewers who will respond to the celebrated event in that celebratory context. (All this bearing in mind the essential unpredictability and instability of the theatre as business, of course.)

This process – if successful – may give the performance (i.e. theatrical event) or exhibition a life *after* the festival, by its association with the celebrity attached to that particular festival event (Hauptfleisch 1997). And should luck hold, the festival will become a means of retaining the event in the cultural memory of the particular society.

FESTIVALS AS THEATRICAL EVENTS AND THE EVENTIFICATION OF CULTURAL TRADITIONS

In the Introduction to this book we suggest that festivals may also fulfil another role in the broader society, namely to *eventify* not only performances, but real-life aspects of a particular society, such as cultural traditions and values. In this respect, considerable attention has lately been paid to South African festivals and pageants which function *as performances* or *as theatrical events* in their own right. Such researchers tend to focus on the important and perhaps less

conscious ideological imperatives lying behind particular events such as the annual 'Cape Coon Carnival', the 1938 symbolic ox-wagon trek, the 1952 'founder's day' celebrations with the *Van Riebeeck Festival* or the 1994 inauguration of Nelson Mandela and the ushering in of the 'new South Africa' (Staub 1992; Kruger 1999; Martin 2000; Merrington 1999).

To illustrate this concept I want to consider two examples in South African cultural history, namely the *Grahamstown Festival* and the *Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees* ('Little Karoo National Arts Festival' – more commonly known as the *Oudtshoorn Festival* or simply the *KKNK* nowadays). Both these festivals have come to play very particular *eventifying* roles in the theatrical system and the cultural value system of the country – in the same way that the works of some playwrights, novelists, painters and musicians played eventifying roles in society, turning everyday issues and occurrences into socio-political 'events'.

The *Grahamstown Festival* is the grandparent of modern South African festivals and is annually reviewed and discussed (see, for example, the *South African Theatre Journal* from 1987 onwards). Founded more than 25 years ago and still going strong, it not only introduced the concept of the multidisciplinary arts festival to South Africa, it also shaped the way in which festivals might be run and has become and remained the benchmark of success to other organisers. In addition, it has also achieved an outstanding international reputation as one of the major festivals in the world.

However, its key interest for us here is its origins, deriving from the *1820 Settlers' Foundation's* original aim, namely to celebrate, (re)establish, empower and maintain the cultural heritage of English-speaking South Africans in the face of the triple threat of *Americanisation*, *Afrikanerisation* and *Africanisation*. This cultural imperative was immensely powerful and, though it has been softened, adapted and broadened along the way, it is really what has kept the festival unique and distinctive, and remains fundamental to much of its focus and success. It has also determined the shape and content of, and general response to, the festival over the years.

Similar points can be made about virtually all the other major festivals which have followed over the intervening years, each of them having some socio-cultural focus of importance. The best comparable example must be the *KKNK* at Oudtshoorn and its linked regional

festivals. It is therefore on this latter festival that I wish to focus as example and case study in the rest of the ensuing discussion.

FESTIVALS AND 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 (like the English in the 1970s) began to fear the extinction of its language and culture under the ANC-led ‘new South Africa’ dispensation and its expressed preference for English as a *lingua franca*. The festivals include the already mentioned *KKNK*, as well as 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 *Suid-Ooster Fees* (‘South-Easter Festival’) in Bellville. Once more the original impetus was the need to celebrate, (re-)establish, empower and maintain the cultural heritage of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans in the face of the language’s diminished official status, from co-national language with English to one of nine ‘national languages’. There is also the triple threat of potential *Americanisation*, *Anglicisation* and *Africanisation*.

Certainly in this respect the series of linked Afrikaans festivals have not only 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, but in and of themselves constitute events which seek to celebrate that culture in all its diversity.

The *KKNK* was the first to be established and had as express aim the promotion of the Afrikaans language. From its inception this festival-as-theatrical-event was conceived as a vehicle to express a particular vision of the Afrikaans and ‘Afrikaner’ cultural context to the public at large (directly and indirectly).⁸ Its example then opened up the way for the *Aardklop Festival* (which seeks to emulate the work of the *KKNK* in the north), and the rest of the festivals mentioned above. Powerful driving forces for this network of festivals are strong support from Afrikaans cultural organisations (e.g. the *Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Organizations* and the *Afrikaans Language and Culture Association*), cultural and political leaders,

Afrikaans artists and the Afrikaans media and other businesses (notably *Naspers* and *Media 24*).

To study this phenomenon more closely I shall quote substantial excerpts from two review articles I wrote and published in 2001 and 2003, which were informal and journalistic responses to the festival event in question, before going on to a brief evaluation of these personal experiences in the final section. (Please note that the articles are used here as examples and are substantially published as they originally appeared, therefore references to time and year – for example ‘now’, ‘here’ – refer to the particular year and city in which I attended the festival – not to today.)

THE KLEIN KAROO NASIONALE KUNSTEFEEES (KKNK) (2001 & 2003)

*The 2001 KKNK festival (Hauptfleisch 2001)*⁹

The main programme alone featured more than 80 productions of plays and cabarets, about 50 being premieres, with as many or more on the fringe. (See also below, the 2003 case study.) In most cases the shared element was an awareness of memory and history – with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the ‘un-manning’ of the white male, the Anglo-Boer war, and the re-defining of the notion of Afrikaner as *leitmotifs*. Extremely well supported were the cultural-political debates surrounding the future of Afrikaans, with Afrikaner pitted against Afrikaner/Afrikaans-speaking South African. Significantly verbal performances – verse, narratives, jokes, chat-shows, lieder and folk-songs, debates, plays dripping with dialogue – still dominate Afrikaans theatre, unlike the more physical, non-verbal work dominating the English festivals. It makes sense, of course, if you think of the festival itself as a celebration of Afrikaans the language, i.e. the Afrikaans *word*.

Interestingly, a number of these works did not do well away from the festival venues. These include virtually all the new ‘serious’ plays at this year’s festival. On the other hand, some again *have* had a remarkable life, notably the cabarets and revues which just seem to be more popular in the cities.

This sets up an intriguing question, of course. Is there something like a ‘festival play’ which is *only* a festival play – acceptable in Grahamstown, Oudtshoorn, Potchefstroom, etc. during the festival only? It would almost seem so. Certainly audiences



It pays to advertise it seems. As the streets of the Karoo town Oudtshoorn fill with festival-goers every empty space becomes a venue and every shopfront or wall becomes a billboard - all clamouring for attention. Photograph by the author.

behaved *differently* at this festival – very easily 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, from all walks of life. The festival appears to be a total experience for many and they have widely ranging but specific expectations of the programme and the setting. Certainly they love the controversy – flocking to get tickets for the Breytenbach show, or shows displaying risqué posters. At the same time they are easily bored, upset or disgusted (or at least make a grand-stand show of pretending to be shocked!) – and reserve the right to say so or to display their disapproval.

Surely there is an entertaining sociology of the festival audience yet to be written - and the case of this year’s most controversial play – rebel-poet Breyten Breytenbach’s *Die Toneelstuk* (The Play), directed by ever-provocative Marthinus Basson. Surely everyone knew what they were in for – a dense, highly symbolic, non-linear, non-narrative and often extremely vulgar text, dealing with issues of trauma, self-castigation and *angst*, woven in sublime poetic language and

presented in a visually arresting form by a superb director and cast. *Not* your run of the mill ‘popular play’. Yet the houses were packed – and every night people got up and walked out during the course of the show. The director – a lone voice claiming this to be a seminal text in the history of the new Afrikaans theatre (a sentiment not widely shared by critics) – felt affronted, as did the author, and said so, commenting on the bad manners shown by the audience, though clearly basing this on the notion of a European and a metropolitan audience. Then there is the (festival) *audience’s* perspective: theatre is a speculative process at best, and the festival audiences are generally not ‘sophisticated’ theatre audiences, but people out for fun. They feel that having paid (exorbitantly, they may judge) for the ticket, they have a right to attend the play, but they also have a right to walk out if they wish, particularly if they feel they are being patronized, offended or insulted.

Oudtshoorn draws many white Afrikaans-speaking and some English-speaking patrons now, but is not yet much patronised by black speakers of African languages. When one considers the conventions of theatre attendance and response in urban and rural black performance, the mind boggles at what the reactions might have been if the audiences were less homogeneously Afrikaans. Perhaps *Die Toneelstuk* is not a seminal text, but it is certainly a most thought-provoking theatrical event, causing a great deal of spirited debate.

In addition there was, as always, the bazaar element, the partying and socialising which seems to dominate at all festivals. To the dismay of some cultural aficionados and theatre lovers, there also seem to be thousands of people who come to the festivals for the party *not* the culture. They may attend the odd pop concert, go to the ever-popular *Kaktus op die Vlakte*,¹⁰ but for the rest they cruise the streets, stalls, restaurants, wine-tasting booths and pubs. And why not? It’s their money, their choice. Then there are those who apparently come for an annual fix – attending everything in ‘shop-till-you-drop’ mode, taking it in a kind of wholesale fashion, attending as much as possible in the week they are there – possibly to last them the rest of the year.

But, again, this is neither unusual for festivals nor limited to Afrikaans-speaking South Africans. All these matters are common to Grahamstown and to Oudtshoorn. What then is distinctive and different about the Afrikaans festival? It is not in the content of the shows or the stalls, it is on the streets. It is in fact in these very pubs,

food tents, wine stalls, restaurants and camping sites where the key thing happens: everyone talks, jokes and argues in his or her version of *Afrikaans*. The common denominator in Oudtshoorn is not culture, not even the rather conservative, wordy Afrikaans theatre – it is something more pervasive. It is *Die Taal*, (The Language), it is the youngest language in the world, it is Afrikaans as she is spoken throughout the country, *krom en skeef*,¹¹ as she comes, by people from north and south, east and west. The topics of discussion may be politics, culture, plays, concerts, art, controversy, wine, food, the weather, sex, etc., it does not really matter.

It is another kind of country this festival, a vibrant space where English and other languages are tolerated in a way (some plays are even in English and actually well supported), but Afrikaans is alive, where it is enthusiastically used, relished, celebrated and enjoyed. For the time being it would seem, the new Southern African context is being seen as a challenge to be confronted and even embraced.

The 2003 KKNK Festival (Hauptfleisch 2003)

I attended the 2003 *Little Karoo National Arts Festival* on an impulse, with my friend Jan Vorster, who reserved our accommodation, while I booked our theatre tickets before setting off. A necessary move, for the good shows are usually sold out months in advance. Jan being a man who clearly understands the basics, we stopped *en route* to stock up on wine, an essential precaution against snake-bite, an overdose of *boeremusiek* (lit. farmer's music), boredom, bad theatre, late-night anxiety and the outrageous festival prices of basic foodstuffs.

Our accommodation was on the edge of town, an austere but functional room in a wing of the army infirmary (snugly tucked up to some major venues and overlooking the parking area and artery road). The provision of accommodation and food are, of course, two sources of real income and job creation for the inhabitants, and they are not going to let the opportunity slip of fleecing you to the bone - remember this only comes along once a year, and then only for a week. So every hostel, garden cottage, spare room, garage, tool- or garden shed and caravan are converted into 'charming rooms for rent', with breakfast included (another gamble – this could set you up for the day or barely keep you going for an hour). The fact is 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 (at all festivals), and nowhere is it more apparent than in the need to find place for the more than 30 000 people who descend on the town to stay. (The same is true of other towns hosting large festivals, e.g. Grahamstown, Potchefstroom, Kimberley, Bloemfontein and so on). And most people do it well.

Next we had a serious planning session for our culture and entertainment for the week, poring over the thick (112 page) programme, which claimed to offer an astounding list of 839 performances, plus 38 art exhibitions. We needed to fit in play attendance with meals, exhibits and lounging around at the free open-air productions, pubs, buskers, and the rest while leaving at least some time to drink our wine, socialise, and – if one must – sleep. How do you make it all fit? The organisers do their very best to help you, offering you all kinds of schematisations of their material, scheduling plays on the hour as much as possible. Though, of course, they cannot prevent live shows from running the full length of the hour and sometimes overrunning the hour. Which leads to a lot of late-coming and early departures.

We were surrounded by people for whom this is their once-a-year cultural high, who somehow seem able to squeeze in five or more performances a day. You recognize them immediately, sitting on the edges of their seats at shows, a programme clutched in the hand, their watches frequently consulted, sprinting to the door as the lights go down, heading for the next performance, then standing there already planning their next show and their route there. There is a slightly manic light in their eyes as they scuttle down the road.

This hysteria is a rather prominent feature of festivals (along with an apparent belief that you disturb no-one if you come in late, talk and loudly eat chips, send SMS messages, read your programme, and so on during the show), which has been exacerbated (as far as the ‘formal’ and frequent theatre-goer is concerned) in the past few years by TV culture and the frightening informality and audience response tolerated by the non-mainstream theatre practice that developed in the old apartheid ‘townships’ and rural areas. In fact: we have some way to go before the conflicting demands of a participatory African oral culture, the TV and technology generation and the reactionary formal theatre practice inherited from the imported and dominating colonial culture (i.e. sit, shut-up, remain seated till the end of the play), will blend into something approximating a general South African theatre-

going etiquette. For the moment, it is all pretty much up to circumstances, and the source of much rancour and confusion. (See the 2001 review above.)

The key must be the premise on which the contemporary South African festivals are based: art for the people, festivals for *everybody* – whatever their age, race, language, value systems, religion, sexual orientation, social and educational status, theatrical and cultural traditions, and so on. The nature, demands and impact of the festival audience – their status as client and role-player – is clearly one of the key areas to be looked at in any proper study of the festival phenomenon.

We found the streets of the large Karoo town ringing with competing music and laughter, and every public space awash with stalls, advertisements, watering holes, eating places and the like. The whole town, blanketed by a cloud of wood smoke, smelled tantalisingly of *braaivleis* (South African for barbecue) and a variety of aromatic curry dishes. Following the crowd, we found and grabbed a seat with a view at an open-air beer garden on the strategic corner of Baron van Reede and Voortrekker Streets. Here people and cars milled about us, while posters, caravans, tents and stalls seemed crammed in everywhere. From the discussions around us we deduced that the town was bursting at its seams. It began to dawn on me that festivals might actually affect far more than just the artists, the economy and people's cultural perceptions. This thought was going to grow over the days.

Since it was a theatre festival after all and I had to do some work, we also saw and discussed a number of shows. For this we went to some strange and far-flung venues not necessarily well-equipped for such activities, but – what the hell! – that is what festival going is about, not so? Actually it seems not, if you listen to the artists and some of the public. They have been spoilt it would appear, for they want more comfort, more facilities, better sightlines, air-conditioning, and so on. The time of suffering for art is passing, some might argue, and something of the pioneer spirit of the original festival has been lost. Yet there is also a point to some of the complaints. Greed seems to be a factor, organisers trying to put too many productions into the venues, allowing too little getting-in time and providing insufficient and under-trained support staff. A dangerous and debilitating trend.

There were many impressive and thought-provoking plays on offer among the ‘big’ shows (i.e. the serious fare that is supposed to make going to festivals worthwhile), while the fringe and the musical venues offered excellent entertainment, even though many of the shows were clearly stock productions or repeats. In the end I felt that – theatrically speaking at least – none of the plays or musical presentations on offer this particular year had really managed to set the world alight, though this is not necessarily a bad thing of course, for art need not be controversial to be good. Yet the festival somehow appeared a rather bland affair, with none of the *sturm und drang*, excitement, public debate and disgust or outrage associated with 2001 and 2002. Most of the real energy was being expended at the free public stages, especially the packed *Radio Sonder Grense* (Radio Without Limits) stage and in the ubiquitous pubs and beer-gardens, offering ‘live-music’. And – as I came to realize increasingly as I focused on what was going on about me – a festival is a many-faceted thing, with something for everyone. Each person would have found *something* at this year’s festival, there was enough of everything.

So we headed for home. On the way we once more wondered at the claim of an astounding 839 performances on offer. Could this be true? It had felt like that of course, but it was not. The actual tally of *productions* – as opposed to *performances* – was only 180 (and the notion of ‘performances’ was obviously used rather loosely in this context, referring to everything from formal plays and concerts to street events and busking). An amazing number of events nevertheless, which represented a heavy dose of culture for one week.

One of the harshest criticisms being thrown at the festival lately (particularly the ‘high culture’ priests and hard-core high-cultural activists) has been that it is *not* a *cultural festival* but an ‘Afrikaner bazaar’ (Stadler, 2003). A hugely debatable point of course, but at one level – for one week this year – it was abundantly clear that Oudtshoorn *was* almost brazenly and stereotypically declaring itself to be a vast and sprawling fête or bazaar, a place where all speakers of Afrikaans could feel at home, to interact, laugh, argue, philosophise, eat, drink, be merry and engage with each other across their variety of social, cultural, ethnic and other differences.

At another level we had also discovered that for others the *KKNK* represents something more substantial, an event of cultural significance. This was very clear from 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.

Interestingly for me, my voyeuristic touring of the streets revealed – or at least made me sharply aware of – *other* motives, lying somewhere between the two views outlined above. This is to be seen in the actions and enthusiasm of the everyday 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 other, more specific and even mundane, motives, many of them relating simply to the day-to-day processes of making a living, or even in some cases, mere survival.

CONCLUSION: THE KKNK, THE ARTS FESTIVAL CIRCUIT AND THE SEARCH FOR THE RAINBOW CULTURE

There is an important anomaly that arises from my second experience of the festival (2003), one that forces me to question the *seeming* unity of the festival. While I have said above that one could see the festival as a unified entity (Hauptfleisch 2001), even if one simply saw it as an ‘Afrikaner bazaar’, I now tend to think that this view may be false, for the KKNK festival is in actual fact *not* clearly and unambiguously a single entity, but something much more complex. Though there is the conceptual unity of the event as a whole (it takes place in one place, at a specific time, has one programme, and a very general marketing focus on Afrikaans and Afrikaans speakers), yet even within that frame it is actually something much more fragmented. In my contribution to the *Introduction* to this book I explain this in terms of having postulated that a festival such as this is often not a single entity but actually consists of a poly-systemic network of linked *sub-festivals*, each with its own aims, objectives, supporters, processes and impact. In other words, a festival is more often than not an uneasy composite of (potentially) competing activities (Even-Zohar 1979).

The poly-systemic nature of the festival experience seems to me to be a most crucial factor in the whole festivalisation process and its impact on South African theatre and culture. Viewing processes of cultural production in this way would not only help one to understand the complex nature of modern day festivals, but also to understand some of the difficulties facing any attempt at utilising the festival circuit or the specific festival for a socio-cultural purpose of any kind

– most specifically in our search for that elusive *rainbow nation*. For example, a number of the current festivals are well on their way to providing such integrating spaces (and the *Grahamstown Festival* is an important role model in this regard), while others – such as the *KKNK*, *Aardklop* and their partner festivals - are still battling to balance the parochial demands of regional/ethnic/linguistic loyalties with those of national unity and the idea of an African Renaissance.

The fact is that in the South African search for the ultimate healing of the wounds and memories of a divisive and malignant past, many artists and audiences seem to be longing to inhabit some kind of larger cultural space which contains true unity in its inevitable variety, a space where the strands of difference may be bound together and shared in a larger, more encompassing and overarching *South African* cultural system. At the moment that space is increasingly and predictably to be found in public spaces and events – shopping malls, sporting competitions and festivals (cultural and otherwise) – they, more than anything else, it feels to me, constitute the metaphoric rainbow of Bishop Tutu's call.

NOTES

¹ Other examples are the struggle between the British and the South African republics in the Anglo-Boer (South African) War (1899-1902) and the Afrikaans Language Struggle and the evolution of Afrikaner Nationalism (1880-1948). On theatre as a weapon see, for example, Hauptfleisch (1997) and Kruger (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 on 'De beginperiode van het Holland Festival. Festivals en festivalisering'. I have translated it a *festivalisation*.

³ 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).

⁴ South Africa actually had a good record of state support for the arts between 1947 and 1988, creating the first *National Theatre Organisation* in the British Empire in 1947, and transforming that into four well-funded provincial *Performing Arts Councils* in 1963, each with its own permanent companies and theatres. Unfortunately this system was created by the then Nationalist government to support arts *among the white population only*, and the new ANC government of 1994 replaced it with a more 'democratic' and encompassing *National Arts Council* as a funding agency, providing only ad hoc grants to all companies. (See, for example, Hauptfleisch 1997 and Kruger 1999.)

⁵ 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 (e.g. 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 – but the majority of plays live for no more than ten or fifteen performances.

⁶ *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*. For by framing a *particular* happening or event as something of social, cultural, political and 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. (See further Hauptfleisch 2004.)

⁷ For my purposes here a *life event* is any social event which can be seen to have performative qualities (at 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, they 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 utilise this notion, as does the work being done by the *IFTR Working Group on the Theatrical Event*.

⁸ Pinpointing the difference between *Afrikaner* and a *speaker of Afrikaans* (or an *Afrikaans-speaking South African*) has become somewhat problematic, as the political certainties of the past have disappeared in the turbulence of the new 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 the apartheid policies. Many more people in South Africa, however, speak Afrikaans as a mother tongue or second language, and utilise 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.

⁹ The two reviews utilised here are republished with the consent of the editors of the *South African Theatre Journal*, where they were originally published. They have been shortened, but otherwise have been left substantially as originally written.

¹⁰ *Kaktus op die Vlakte* is an annual pop show of popular Afrikaans bands, songs and songwriters. Literally translated it means 'Cactus on the Plains', but it is rather crude joke, for the root word of 'Kaktus' (= kak) means 'shit' in Afrikaans.

¹¹ *Krom en skeef* is an idiomatic expression, which literally means 'bent and skew'.

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