

THE FLOATING CITY:  
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CARNIVAL, CAPE TOWN AND THE QUEERING OF SPACE

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Thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Masters of Art History at Stellenbosch University

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## **DECLARATION**

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## SUMMARY

In this thesis I examine the phenomenon of carnival for its corporeal and spatial expressions of fluid identity formations. The visual constitution of multiple gay/queer identities during carnival is commonly regarded as transgressive of the normative order that is ideologically and physically imbedded in the structure of city. I suggest, however, that the various local performances of homosexuality that are mobilised during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* can be interpreted as simultaneous reinforcements and contestations of sexual stereotypes. By tracing discursive and spatial shifts that have occurred within the South African sexual landscape, I demonstrate how this carnival both transgresses and bolsters heteronormativity. In addition, I explore how race and gender play decisive roles in the constitution of a homonormative gay identity, and investigate how these male, white homonormative assumptions are challenged by a minority of black and lesbian participants. In the process of deconstruction, I also reveal how the interaction between spectator and carnival participant blurs binary constructs of stasis/mobility, subject/object, private/public, and 'normal'/'abnormal'.

## OPSOMMING

In hierdie tesis ondersoek ek die fenomeen van karnaval in terme van die liggaamlike en ruimtelike uitdrukkings van fluïde identiteitsformasies wat dit bewerkstellig. Die visuele vergestaltung van 'gay'/'queer' identiteite gedurende karnaval word in die algemeen beskou as oortredend van die normatiewe orde wat ideologies en fisies in die struktuur van 'n stad gesetel is. Ek stel egter voor dat die verskeidenheid lokale vertonings van homoseksualiteit tydens die *Cape Town Pride Parade* geïnterpreteer kan word as gelyktydige versterkings en bestrydings van seksuele stereotipes. Deur diskursiewe en ruimtelike verskuiwings na te spoor wat in die Suid-Afrikaanse seksuele landskap plaasgevind het, demonstreer ek hoe karnaval heteronormatiewiteit tegelykertyd ondermyn en ondersteun. Verder ondersoek ek ook ras en geslag wat beslissende rolle speel in die oprigting van 'n homonormatiewe gay identiteit, en ek toon aan hoe die homonormatiewe veronderstelling van wit manlikheid uitgedaag word deur 'n minderheid swart en lesbiese deelnemers. Deur die proses van dekonstruksie wys ek verder uit hoe die interaksie tussen toeskouers en deelnemers die binêre opposisies tussen stasie/mobiliteit, subjek/objek, privaat/publiek en 'normaal'/'abnormaal' ondermyn.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated, with much love, to my parents and my brother for their unconditional support and understanding, and to Michael for his perspective and patience.

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## CONTENTS PAGE

### List of Illustrations

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Chapter 1: Carnival Theorised</b>	14
1.1: Bakhtin and Carnival	14
1.2: Bakhtin's Carnival Contested	18
1.3: Contemporary Carnival and Enactments of Ambivalence	21
<b>Chapter 2: Carnival and the City: The Social and Physical Dimensions of Carnavalesque Space</b>	23
2.1: Bakhtin and Space	23
2.2: Orthodox Conceptions of the City	24
2.3: The City Revisited: Carnival and Contemporary Theories of the City	26
2.4: Cape Town as Contested Space: Carnival and the City	29
2.5: Cape Town and the Limits of Carnival	33
2.6: Back to the Marketplace	34
<b>Chapter 3: Carnavalesque Identity: Narrated, Performed, Queered</b>	36
3.1: Sexual Identity and the South African Constitution	36
3.2: Gay vs. Queer: Current Debates Around Sexual Identity	37
3.3: The Performance of Gay/Queer Identities	40
3.3.1: Bakhtin, Carnavalesque Language and the Dialogic Performance of Identity	40
3.3.2: Questions of Agency and the Queer Performance of Identity	45
3.4: Being Gay or Playing Queer: The Visual Rendition of Identity Politics	49
3.4.1: Local and Global Narrations of Gayness and Queerness	49
3.4.2: Queering Gay and Straight	54
3.4.3: Narrations of Defiance, Vocabularies of Compliance	59
3.5: The Carnavalesque Identity Concluded	63
<b>Chapter 4: Carnival and Gay/Queer Constructions of Space</b>	65
4.1: The Private and the Public: Boundaries and the Demarcation of 'Respectability' and 'Deviance'	67
4.1.1: The Private and the Public: The Homosexual and the Heterosexual	70
4.1.2: Closet Spaces (and Dusty Corners)	72

4.1.2.1: The Closet Problematised	74
4.1.2.2: Carnival and the Closet Visualised	76
4.1.3: Body Spaces: Hidden Orifices and Narrations of Identity	79
4.1.3.1: Bakhtin and the Grotesque Body	81
4.1.3.2: Carnival and Ambivalent Displays of the Gay Male Body	83
4.1.3.2.1: Male Genitals and the 'Deviant' Gay Body	84
4.1.3.2.2: Male Musculature and the 'Natural' Gay Body	88
4.1.3.3.1: Carnival and Polarised Displays of the Gay Female Body	92
4.1.3.3.2: Performing 'Butch-Femme': Carnival and the Transgression of the Public Sphere	95
4.1.4: The Private and the Public Concluded	98
4.2: Movement and Stasis: The Realms of the Spectator and the Participant	98
4.2.1: Carnival and the Simultaneous Affirmation and Negation of Difference	102
4.2.2: Carnival and the Blurring of Boundaries	105
4.2.2.1: Spectators Becoming the Spectacle	105
4.2.2.2: Spectators Becoming Participants	107
4.2.2.2.1: Spectators, Surveillance, and the Concept of 'Police'	107
4.2.2.2.2: Carnavalesque Disruptions of Spectatorship and Policing	109
4.2.3: The Realms of the Spectator and Participant Concluded	111
4.3: Global Gay Space: the Rise of the Homonormative	112
4.3.1: Gay Commodity Culture	112
4.3.1.1: City Space and the 'Gay Village'	116
4.3.1.2: Carnavalesque Transgressions of the 'Gay Village'	119
4.3.1.3: Media Spaces and the Gay Press	122
4.3.1.4: Carnival and the Gay Press	123
4.3.2: African Gay Identities and Questions of Authenticity	125
4.3.2.1: African Gay Identities: Histories of Contestation and Avowal	126
4.3.2.2: African Gay Identities and Carnival	131
4.3.3: Carnival, Homonormativity, and the 'Global Gay' Concluded	132
<b>Conclusion</b>	134
<b>Bibliography</b>	136

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

- Figure 1.** Unknown Photographer, *Cape Town Pride – February 2006* (2006).  
Digital Photograph. (Gapleisure 2006) 52
- Figure 2.** Craig Sydney, *Untitled* (2004).  
Digital Photograph. (Sydney 2006). 57
- Figure 3.** Craig Sydney, *Untitled* (2004).  
Digital Photograph. (Sydney 2006). 57
- Figure 4.** Craig Sydney, *Untitled* (2004).  
Digital Photograph. (Sydney 2006). 61
- Figure 5.** Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2007).  
Digital Photograph. 62
- Figure 6.** Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2008).  
Digital Photograph. 77
- Figure 7.** Pierre Oosthuysen, *Untitled* (1990).  
Newspaper Photograph. (De Waal & Manion 2006). 78
- Figure 8.** Wayne Hendriks, *Untitled* (2006).  
Digital Photograph. (Cape Town Pride Gallery 2006) 84
- Figure 9.** Anonymous, *Untitled* (2004).  
Digital Photograph. (Cape Town Pride Gallery 2004) 85
- Figure 10.** Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2008).  
Digital Photograph. 86
- Figure 11.** Craig Sydney, *Untitled* (2004).  
Digital Photograph. (Sydney 2006). 87

<b>Figure 12.</b> Ernst van der Wal, <i>Untitled</i> (2007). Digital Photograph.	91
<b>Figure 13.</b> Ernst van der Wal, <i>Untitled</i> (2008). Digital Photograph.	97
<b>Figure 14.</b> Anonymous, <i>Untitled</i> (1992). Photograph. (De Waal & Manion 2006).	102
<b>Figure 15.</b> Anonymous, <i>Untitled</i> (2005). Digital Photograph. (Cape Town Pride 2005).	104
<b>Figure 16.</b> Anonymous, <i>Untitled</i> (2005). Digital Photograph. (Cape Town Pride 2005).	104
<b>Figure 17.</b> Ernst van der Wal, <i>Untitled</i> (2007). Digital Photograph.	106
<b>Figure 18.</b> Ernst van der Wal, <i>Untitled</i> (2008). Digital Photograph.	110
<b>Figure 19.</b> Unknown Designer, <i>Pink South Africa</i> (2008). Website layout. ( <i>Pink South Africa</i> 2008).	117
<b>Figure 20.</b> Unknown Photographer, <i>Cape Town Pride</i> (2008). Photograph Spread. ( <i>Cape Town Pride</i> 2008: 59)	124
<b>Figure 21.</b> Andrew Wicks, <i>Untitled</i> (2008). Photograph Spread. ( <i>Pride Parade: Pride Heroes: Everyone's a Hero</i> 2008: 22)	124
<b>Figure 22.</b> Ernst van der Wal, <i>Untitled</i> (2008). Digital Photograph.	131



## INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the constitution of a gay/queer identity and its relation to space as it is visually manifested during carnival. My contention is that carnival – as a form of festival that has the capacity to reverse social hierarchies and cross various boundaries for a limited period of time – can disrupt the normative order and social stability of a given space. Space, which can be regarded as a physical, social, metaphorical and/or cultural structure, bears a significant relation to identity; to such an extent that it will be one of the main focus areas in my investigation of transient gay/queer<sup>1</sup> identities that are mobilised during carnival as reactions to certain physical or ideological structures.

I have necessarily utilised textual material from a wide variety of fields. Most sources tend to present either a very vague response to issues surrounding carnival, space and queer identity; or the ambiguity and intricacy of these terms were acknowledged, but treated as separate fields of study that bear little relation to one another. Contemporary sources tend to acknowledge the contingency and interrelatedness of these terms, yet their application is largely limited to the American or European arena. My research addresses these problems by providing a local answer to the diverse, yet largely interrelated characteristics of and issues concerning carnival, space and identity. This inquiry is undertaken as a South African response to the carnivalesque, and I focus on the presentation of gay/queer identity and the subsequent construction or disruption of space during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'gay' to refer to homosexual identity constructions. I make a distinction between the terms 'gay' and 'homosexual', as the former encodes the sexual subjectivity, internalisation of identity and patterns of social relations amongst people who identify as gay (Dowsett 1993: 703), while the latter is used to denote homosexual acts. I use the term 'gay' as inclusive of both male and female sexual identities, and the term 'lesbian' is also sometimes used interchangeably with 'gay female' to refer to identity descriptions as they are encountered in certain sources. The implied difference between the terms 'gay' and 'queer' is also significant – 'queer' (a somewhat ambivalent term noted by theorists to be difficult to define) is often perceived as a rejection of fixed notions of sexuality. It is a term that denotes multiple sexual identity constructions and a questioning of conventional notions of gay/lesbian identity and the normative concept of straight (Horne 1996: 14). It can also be noted that "both queer and politics intend to expose and disrupt the normalising politics of identity as practiced in the straight and lesbian and gay mainstream; whereas queer politics mobilises against all normalised hierarchies, queer theory puts into permanent crisis the identity-based theory and discourses that have served as the unquestioned foundation of lesbian and gay life" (Nicholson & Seidman 1995: 116). The difference between gay and queer identity is of the utmost importance for my discussion of performativity and sexuality, and is discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

The *Cape Town Pride Parade* can be regarded as a form of carnival that creates a platform for its participants to temporarily assert their gay/queer identity in relation to a certain space.<sup>2</sup> These spaces entail both the physical and/or ideological structures of Cape Town (the city within which this carnival takes place), and the visual culture and media spaces that are created for and during this event. Space can therefore, within the context of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, be regarded as a visual and discursive mobilisation of structure and identity. Furthermore, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is a very good example of the inherently contradictory, ambiguous, and contingent nature of carnival. In my writing, carnival is not only explored as a force that can impose its own set of regulations and provide coherency for its own structures, but also as a phenomenon with the capacity to disrupt normative order and stability. Cape Town, as a place in which the “memories of sexual and spatial desires linger in the palimpsest underlying national reconciliation” (Leap 2005: 235), is therefore the ideal setting in which to explore the entwined nature of sexuality, space and carnival. Cape Town’s own historical context, as a city shaped during apartheid by prejudice, racism, and slavery, and the influences it had on the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, are explored in order to understand the relationship between the participants of carnival and the physical and ideological structures of the city sphere.

My aim is to investigate the *Cape Town Pride Parade* as the result of diverse global and local influences that shape the establishment of lgbt (lesbian, bisexual, gay and transgender) identities. Certain Eurocentric universalisms are treated as sites of deconstruction for the unravelling of stereotypical gay narratives. Universalisms, such as the notion of a ‘liberated’ gay community as ‘essentially visible’, as well as prevailing dichotomous structures that are imbedded in sexual identities, are addressed in my writing by drawing on various textual

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<sup>2</sup> The *Cape Town Pride Parade* (or *Pride Festival* as it is also known) was launched in 1993, and it was initially staged during the months of either September or October. In 2003, the carnival was postponed to February 2004 in an effort to attract gay tourism to the festival and the city (an issue that I will investigate in more depth in Chapter 4.3). The months of February and March are the period during which Cape Town sees the greatest income from tourism, and the rescheduling of carnival dates proved successful with a particularly well-supported festival in both 2004 and 2005 (*The History of Cape Town Pride* 2008). These logistical choices are made by the *Cape Town Pride Parade’s* Board of Directors, which include prominent members of Cape Town’s gay/queer population, such as Zackie Achmat, Ronnie Ngalo, Sheryl Ozinsky, The Very Reverend Rowan Smith, and others. The Board also employs a Festival Director charged with the task of overseeing carnival, with Ian McMahon acting as the current Director. The *Pride Shelter Trust*, a non-profit organisation registered as a section 21 company, was also initiated under the auspices of the *Cape Town Pride Festival*. The *Pride Shelter Trust* still runs on financial support from *Cape Town Pride Parade* and provides short-term safe accommodation to people who have been thrown out of their homes or assaulted because of their sexual orientation (De Swart 2006).

sources. Notions of gay identity as necessarily being 'deviant'/'natural' (Dollimore 1997; Foucault 1980b; Van Zyl 2005b), 'fake'/'authentic' (Butler 1993; Gevisser & Reid 1994; Manalansan 2003) are critically deconstructed. Visual culture is also of the utmost importance for my study of these and various other sexual expressions, as it can be regarded as a reflection of either the stabilisation or the fluctuation (queering) of identity. The visual presentation of sexuality is thus investigated in relation to space – my aim is to determine the way in which a 'global' repertoire of 'gayness' has been appropriated within the South African context, the role it plays in notions surrounding sexual citizenship, and its influence on the physical and ideological structures of the city. 'Global gay' narratives are specifically criticised in contemporary literature for creating a new form of 'homonormativity'<sup>3</sup> through which gay spaces and identities are increasingly commodified (Bell & Binnie 2004; Berlant & Warner 1998; Brent Ingram & Bouthillette 1997; Kitchin 2002). Global narratives have exerted their influence on local sexual geographies to such an extent that growing disparity is evident between gayspace (a largely commodified space that has been shaped by forms of homonormativity) and queerspace (a space that has in itself or through its appropriation the capacity to disrupt normative order) within the South African arena.

Space – as a delineated or loosely bounded area occupied cognitively and/or physically (Brent Ingram 1997: 19) – has the potential to enforce normative order by regulating identities. Yet, space can also be constructed, manipulated or reclaimed through transgressive acts which disrupt normative regulation. I am particularly interested in carnival as a form of queering space; as the disruption of normative order, hegemonic structures, social stability, and stereotyped narratives of identity. The term 'queer' can be defined as a "liberating rubric encompassing multiple sensibilities" which include "sensibilities other than the normative with a propensity toward, but not exclusive of, the homoerotic" (Brent Ingram 1997: 19). Queerspace likewise demonstrates a receptiveness towards multiple narratives of place and it functions largely as "wishful thinking or desires that become solidified; a seduction of the reading of space where queerness...for some fleeting moments, dominate the (heterocentric) norm, the dominant social narrative of the landscape" (Brent Ingram 1997: 21). The *Cape Town Pride Parade's* blurring of the private and public spheres is an example of such a contestation of moral values and notions of respectability. Other spaces, such as the

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<sup>3</sup> Homonormativity is a form of regulation that determines 'appropriate' and 'respectable' gay identities, and excludes "'undesirable' forms of sexual expression, including their expression in space – for example, by reducing the 'gay public sphere' to consumption spaces and gentrified neighbourhoods only" (Kitchin 2002: 1811).

potentially dichotomous realms of the spectators and participants of carnival, are critically investigated in order to account for the hostile environment that is sometimes created by rivalry between those that oppose and endorse carnival. Often stereotyped as separate, contradicting spheres in the media, the roles of spectators and participants are explored for their simultaneous maintenance and transgression of boundaries that support such binary renderings. Similarly, the boundaries used to maintain divided areas of a cultural or social 'inside' and 'outside', an 'us' and 'them', are critically discussed (and queered) in order to contest the notion of culture, identity and space as mere forms of normative regulation, constraint, order making and binary categorisation (Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1999).

I employ a post-structuralist deconstruction<sup>4</sup> of language systems and discourses of power which problematises the conception of stable, universal systems of knowledge (Hanssen 2000: 7), and which destabilises the binary notion of hierarchical relationships within structures of language and thought. The theoretical foundation of my deconstruction is first and foremost based on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque (1968). His theorisation of carnival – as a force that has the capacity to disrupt social stability, oppose normative order, instigate riot, and even create anomy – guided my research into the phenomenon of carnival, and it is of the utmost importance for my writing. Foucault's theory of the discourse of power – according to which the human subject is discursively constituted by hegemonic formations – is also of great importance. Foucault's notion of sexual 'normalcy' and 'deviance' as invented through systems of power (which he presented in 1980 in his seminal work *The History of Sexuality*), is crucial for my investigation of sexuality's spatial and carnivalesque constitution.

By drawing on Foucault's theorisation of the human subject and its discursive constitution, Judith Butler's investigation of identity politics in the books *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993) were of great value in my investigation of the performative aspects of identity. These works, which create a basis from which to critically engage with issues regarding (sexual) identity, contradict Bakhtin's own formulation of carnival as productive of human agency. Butler argues that human subjectivity should not merely be understood as something that necessarily 'is', nor as an identity that is

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<sup>4</sup> Derrida's formulation of deconstruction, as textual analysis designed to uncover deferred meanings, is used in my investigation of both theoretical sources and visual culture. Derrida defines deconstruction in terms of a "traditional philosophical opposition [in which] we have not a peaceful coexistence of facing terms but a violent hierarchy. One of the terms dominates the other...occupies the commanding position. To deconstruct the opposition is above all, at a particular moment, to reverse the hierarchy" (1972: 56-57).

voluntarily constructed or performed, but that the performative nature of identity renders it a compulsory, reiterative and ritualised process (1993). This thesis is, however, not motivated by the desire to enforce any theoretical standpoint on the phenomenon of carnival, but rather to engage critically with the sexual identities that are displayed during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. As carnival is often contradictory in nature, and entails multiple performances where sexual identity and human agency are *simultaneously* disavowed and sanctioned, different (even conflicting) theoretical positions are employed to account for the multifarious natures of carnival and sexuality.

Of the particular theoretical sources that I have consulted to determine the various sexual histories that are visually narrated during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, Mark Gevisser & Edwin Cameron's compilation of essays in *Defiant Desire* (1994) provided crucial information on local lgbt identities. Shaun De Waal and Anthony Manion's compilation of essays in *Pride: Protest and Celebration* (2006) was also instrumental in creating a conceptual and historical link between changes in the South African political sphere and developments in *Pride Parades*. Mikki van Zyl and Melissa Steyn's compilation of essays in *Performing Queer: Shaping Sexualities 1994-2004* (2005) was another important textual source for understanding South African gay/queer sensibilities. Whereas most of the other books provided information concerning gay oppression in the pre-apartheid years, this book specifically discussed contemporary issues, such as the influence of globalisation on 'indigenous' sexual narratives and the sexual and spatial discourses that shape the public and private spheres. John Howley's compilation of essays in *Postcolonial Queer* (2001) directed my investigation of queer diasporas and transient sexual identities in non-European countries. In particular, William Spurlin's essay 'Broadening Postcolonial Studies/Decolonising Queer Studies: Emerging Queer Identities and Cultures in Southern Africa' provided valuable information concerning the global influence of queer narratives on local notions of sexuality, while stressing the contingency of sexual experiences and histories.

With regards to sexual identity and space, Gordon Brent Ingram and Anne-Marie Bouthillette's compilation of essays in *Queers in Space* (1997) provided a strong theoretical base from which to bridge the gap between queer sensibilities and spatial conceptions. This work informed my own investigation of the relationship between queer identity and the physical and social landscape, as well as gay/queer access to the public domain. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's investigation of queer zones and gay spaces in terms of their

public and private dimensions was also insightful as they emphasise the influence of hegemonic power on the “privatisation of gay sex and the sexualisation of private personhood” (1998: 559). These authors problematise the subordinate relation that is forced upon queer sensibilities with regards to heteronormative institutions and homophobic geographies. Likewise, David Bell and John Binnie (2004) explore the influence of heteronormative culture on narratives of identity, while they also acknowledge the rise of new homonormative sensibilities. This new homonormativity, which propagates the casting-out and marginalisation of ‘queer unwanted’, presents a largely commodified (white, male) gay identity that denies the spatial expression, ‘authenticity’ and ‘validity’ of ‘other’ identities.

In my investigation of both heteronormative and homonormative processes that occur during carnival, I deconstruct not only written texts surrounding the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, but also the visual culture that is created during this event. The relevant visual material was collected from both existing media sources (such as newspapers, magazines or advertising material for the *Cape Town Pride Parade*), as well as personal encounters with carnival (such as photographs taken during the parade). As the textual sources available on the *Cape Town Pride Parade* are severely limited, my partaking in carnival as both a participant during various parades and as a volunteer in the organising committee, was crucial for determining the logistics and conceptual framework behind the event.

My deconstruction of normative sexual identities moves from an overview of carnivalesque thought and identity theories to a detailed account of the visual culture and spatial properties that are produced during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. As such, Chapter 1 situates my discussion of carnival within the ideological framework of the ‘carnavalesque’ as theorised by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin’s theorisation of the carnivalesque as an expression of individual freedom, as proposed in his work *Rabelais and His World* (1965), is of cardinal value for my thesis. Bakhtin perceives carnival to be a way of life, and states that “carnival is not a spectacle seen by people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all people. While carnival lasts, there is no life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom” (1965: 7). According to Bakhtin, carnival is not only a way to attain personal freedom, but also a way to construct a form of unity and destabilise the categories of spectator and participant.

Whereas carnival is presented by Bakhtin as a form of chaos and disruption, I do not only investigate its capacity to disrupt normative order, but also acknowledge carnival as a force that can impose its own set of regulations and provide coherency for its own structures. Even though carnival fiercely opposes the demarcation of physical, social and cultural space, it also erects its own boundaries through which realms of participation and spectatorship, a (sub)cultural 'inside' and 'outside', can be separated. Revelling in its own conflicting nature, carnival is semantically slippery and difficult to pin down. Defying clear categorisation, carnival disrupts binary oppositions by refusing to be hierarchically subordinate to normative structures of power. Yet, carnival defies being categorised as the 'chaotic' opposite for 'order' by not being either 'chaotic' or 'ordered', but both. It is mobile and static; found in divergence and similarity; a form of unification and separation.

In Chapter 2, I investigate the city as a physical, social and/or cultural structure that creates its own boundaries and imposes its own normative regulations. This investigation is necessitated by the manner in which the participants of carnival react to or even mobilise against not only the idea of 'city', but specifically Cape Town's own ideological structure. The latter provides a space within which physical and discursive carnivalesque movements allow individuals or subcultural groups to assert their identity. The construction of a gay/queer identity in relation to the physical sphere of the city is also dependant on space as constitutive of a human being's perception of and relation to forms and objects. The city thus provides not only a sense of stability, but a space within which human identity can be formulated in terms of a physical environment that contains and regulates the body. Since the city is proffered by modernity as a mechanism to enforce discipline, social solidarity, cohesion and a sense of territorial belonging, it can be seen as a spatial structure that segments and controls population groups in order to create a form of cohesion and reduce urban disorder.

Carnival can be regarded as a contestation of a city's hegemonic structures. As a form of social celebration or even protest, carnival has the capacity to lay claim to city spaces. It can therefore be seen as a mechanism for certain subcultures and individuals to affirm their rights to the city and to define it as their own territory. For instance, the appropriation of city space through carnival can be seen as a way for the members of Cape Town's lgbt subcultures to temporarily claim parts of the city as their own – an action that constitutes an important shift in agency when considering the marginal status that has been historically ascribed to them in apartheid South Africa.

In this chapter I also provide a more general overview of different perceptions of space and place – I focus on the recent history of spatial thinking in the field of Cultural Geography to demonstrate the diverse and often conflicting ways in which space and place are conceptualised in contemporary society.<sup>5</sup> While carnival is noted for its own conflicting nature, the relationship it bears to space is no less ambivalent or diverse, and my discussion will demonstrate the multifarious properties of carnivalesque space.

Carnival is not only manifested spatially in the realm of the city, but also finds corporeal expression in various carnivalesque identities that are visualised and performed within its domain. Chapter 3 serves as a platform for the discussion of the performative nature of identity and the role it plays in the subcultural grouping of individuals during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. The reason for this emphasis on the performative nature of identity is because carnival is generally perceived as a form of spectacle – as a platform on which to stage particular identities. Since my exploration of carnival is based on the performative aspects of carnivalesque identity, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of a performative 'self' that is dialogically constituted (1981; 1984; 1993) is crucial for my discussion.<sup>6</sup> Judith Butler's theory of performativity (1990; 1993) provides a contemporary theorisation of the performative 'self' according to which identity is not voluntarily constructed or spontaneously performed (as argued by Bakhtin), but constitutes a compulsory, reiterative and ritualised process.

I also investigate the relationship between sexually marginalised people and the group identities that they perform. The mobilisation of identity, as negotiated and embodied in the

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural Geography is an area of research that increasingly emphasises the cultural production of power (as it is reflected in systems of dominance and subordination) and the ideological processes through which dominant discourses are negotiated and imposed (Jackson 1989). Cultural Geography has also been known for the interdependent theorisation of spatial and sexual research, with Manuel Castell's *The City and the Grassroots* (1983) being one of the first attempts to chart lgbt spaces. The production of 'gay space' has become a complex category which instigated a proliferation of academic studies based on sexuality and its territorial dimensions. Contemporary research within the field of Cultural Geography also highlights the lack of critical attention paid to heterosexual dominance in the construction and regulation of space. The inequalities that persist with regards to gay, queer and straight access to space are critically investigated in Chapter 4 when I deal with the spatial relationship between the participants and the spectators of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

<sup>6</sup> Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Art* (1984) and *Towards a Philosophy of Act* (1993) are works in which he identifies the acts of speech and writing as linguistic performances that occur between different speakers or authors. In these works, Bakhtin formulates the use of literary or verbal dialogue as essential for the discursive establishment of identity.



*Cape Town Pride Parade*, is influenced by the relationship between different individuals and groups who perceive themselves to share certain key characteristics. Within the context of carnival, this relationship entails the association between culturally diverse participants and it is not constituted between the members of a singular gay community, but rather between a variety of subcultural groupings.<sup>7</sup> Since subcultural groups are relatively transient and geographically unstable, coherence amongst their members are upheld through the maintenance of boundaries through which an 'inside' and 'outside' can be established. The simultaneous erection, maintenance and transgression of these boundaries are investigated in relation to the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

The development and emergence of gay identities and queer sensibilities in the South African arena are also explored by looking at different narratives and histories, both local and global, which have been incorporated in contemporary *Cape Town Pride Parades*. One such global event that played a definitive role in the construction of South African lgbt identities is the *Stonewall Riots* of 1969 – an event that is still regarded as a key component of gay-rights struggles on an international level. Not only will the influence of such Eurocentric universalisms on South African conceptions of sexual liberation be explored, but also local perceptions of gay/queer identity as it has been shaped in the pre- and post-apartheid years.

Chapter 4, which deals with the *Cape Town Pride Parade* as a phenomenon that actively queers and transforms various spaces, is the focal point of my research. This chapter will serve as a

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<sup>7</sup> Shaun de Waal and Anthony Manion note that the use of the word 'community' with regards to queer people is contentious as it is often used in a thoughtless manner by not only the media, but even by gay activists or *Pride* organisers who employ it to denote "something notional and hopeful rather than concretely actual" (2006: 9). Even though this word can be used to describe a sense of commonality, the only thing that the diverse members of the 'gay community' often have in common is their difference from a heterosexual norm. The participants of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, which are usually described as members of a gay community, group themselves into structures that are actually more subcultural in formation. Community suggests a permanent population with family kinship being a central component, while subcultures are identified as groups organised apart from family structures, existing in a state of relative transience (Thornton 1997: 2). Subcultures are furthermore identified as a "disenfranchised, disaffected and unofficial" form of grouping, with strong distinctions (based on collective criteria, such as sexuality) imposed between members and non-members (Thornton 1997: 3). Subcultures characteristically appropriate parts of the city and the street, with struggles over territory, place and space being core subcultural issues. As the prefix "sub" suggests, subcultures are ascribed a secondary rank to other cultural formations – not only are subcultures often positioned by themselves or by others as 'deviant', but they are also subjected to the norms of dominant society, rendering them 'inferior' in status due to social differences in terms of class, race, ethnicity, age and/or sexuality. Please note that, as most of the references consulted on the grouping of lgbt people still refer to them as 'communities', this term found its way into this thesis, and should rather be understood as subcultures.

platform for my discussion of queerspace – of the “social transactions, landscape flows, and environmental impacts related to minority sexual identities and the marginalisation of erotic expression” (Brent Ingram 1997: 31). Carnival’s capacity to transgress various boundaries is determined – not only the boundaries of heteronormative structures, but even the contemporary boundaries that are employed to conceptually demarcate queerspace.

This discussion serves as a point of departure for a range of issues, the first of which is the cultural and social boundaries that are employed to demarcate separate spheres for the ‘private’ and ‘public’ expression of (sexual) identity. I launch my discussion in Chapter 4.1 by investigating different boundaries as social constructs and symbolic devices that enforce the demarcation of space. The relationship between the private and the public is linked to notions of respectability – determining which actions should be concealed (thus consigned to the private sphere); or which actions and identities can be displayed through the participation in public discourses.

In the next subsection (Chapter 4.2) I focus on the construction of identities during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* in terms of participation and spectatorship. The mobilisation of identities during carnival is not only formulated in terms of subcultural affiliation amongst the participants, but also in relation to a perceived opposition: the spectators. The role that spectatorship plays within the context of carnival is described by Awam Amkpa as a problematic enunciation of hegemony which can sometimes render it “a tourist experience whereby their [the spectator’s] panoptic gaze confirms their identities and superiority in economic, ethnic, and, most of all, gendered terms” (1999: 102). Within the mostly heteronormative environment of the city, sometimes characterised during carnival by rivalry between participants and spectators, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is regarded as a space in which marginalised subcultures can perform identity. Sometimes, carnival can problematically be requested from hegemonic institutions. Such invitations are not necessarily indicative of the acceptance of diversity and hybridity within normative society, but rather emphasise the structure of normativity and centeredness from which these marginalised groups are excluded (Amkpa 1999: 97). Nonetheless, marginality can be utilised by queer groups to highlight the problems surrounding the demarcation of centre and periphery, and to show the limits of dominant culture. In this subchapter my focus is on the visual articulation and mobilisation of marginalised sexual and social identities in opposition to hegemonic institutions and normative regulations in the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

I conclude my investigation of queerspace (Chapter 4.3) by considering the rise of homonormative regulations of gay/queer identity. In this section I critically discuss the contemporary emphasis that is placed on an 'authentic' gay identity, as apposed to the 'spectacle' of a performed, transient identity. Whereas carnival can be regarded as a platform on which multiple sexual identities are performed, and therefore entails a more transient and ambiguous take on politics of the self, contemporary narrations of 'gayness' restrict the identities displayed during carnival as a more commodified and normative conception of identity is encountered within queer subcultures. Gay/queer identities are increasingly scrutinised for signs that they are yielding to processes of globalisation<sup>8</sup> and commodification.<sup>9</sup> I investigate this phenomenon by focusing on the rise of 'universal' gay sensibilities in the global arena, and subsequent perceptions of local sexuality. Narrations of a 'global gay' identity have tremendous bearing on issues ranging from local perceptions of 'authentic', 'natural' gay identities, to the carnivalesque mobilisation of transient, queer identities within the South African arena. The seemingly opposing spheres of normative 'gay' and transient 'queer' identities are deconstructed in this chapter by using the *Cape Town Pride Parade* as a basis from which to assess the role that visual culture plays in such seemingly

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'globalisation' refers to the emergence of global cultural systems "in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people are becoming increasingly aware that they are receding" (Waters 1995: 3). I also acknowledge the relationship between globalisation and processes of commodification, insofar as "globalisation is that set of processes by which the world is rapidly being integrated into one economic space via increased international trade, the internationalisation of production and financial markets, and the internationalisation of a commodity culture promoted by an increasingly networked global telecommunications system" (Gibson-Graham 2001: 239). Globalisation evokes diverse reactions to its influence on local institutions and cultures: "while some observers perceive globalisation in its various manifestations as a threat to local diversity and local autonomy, others argue that it rather represents a change in the context in which local development paths are articulated" (Amin & Thrift 1994: 1). These are some of the most important viewpoints that I will use in my investigation of the effects of globalisation on local narrations of sexual identity.

<sup>9</sup> I draw on a Marxist definition of commodification as the production of commodities for market exchange rather than direct use, and as a barometer of the conversion of use-value into exchange-values (*Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* 1998: Sv 'commodification'). In terms of Karl Marx's distinction between use- and exchange-values, the process of commodification takes place when economic value is allocated to something not previously considered in economic terms. This can for instance be applied to the field of sexual identity, which is increasingly tied to the marketing, exchange and consumption of various products. The individual is increasingly drawn into consumer culture as advertisements, the popular press, television and films, etc., provide an excess of stylised images pertaining to corporeal expressions of identity (Featherstone 1991: 170). The commodification of sexual identity is of particular significance for my thesis as I investigate the manner in which gayness is often 'sold' and commercialised in contemporary consumer cultures.

polarised identity formations. I also discuss the contemporary role of carnival with regards to *Pride Parades*, and determine whether Bakhtin's notion of carnival as a disruptive force is still relevant in today's hetero- and homonormative societies.

In this subsection I also reveal how access to space, specifically Cape Town's 'Gay Village', is governed by homonormative processes. I demonstrate that whiteness, maleness and affluence are some of the principle 'gay norms' that are imbedded within the sexual sphere of this city. With the majority of spatial and identity markers in Cape Town's 'Gay Village' centred around homonormative desires, rights of entry and consumption are governed by the discriminations (consciously or inadvertently) enforced by the 'normal' white gays. Narrations of 'normal gayness' favour certain racial, gendered and economic attributes, and consequently gay identity's right to spatial expression is rendered the exclusive territory of a white phallogocentric bourgeoisie. I propose that black homosexual identities, with little room for spatial representation, are often denied the breathing space to (re)negotiate themselves within the contemporary South African context. These identities are not only prevented from exiting the colonial and apartheid closets of the past, but they are deprived of spatial expressions that would grant them the same 'authenticity' and 'validity' as white gay identities. With the majority of South African and global gay discourses drawing on white narrations and histories, those sexualities that do not slot into European homosexual categories are fringed, if not erased.

In the Conclusion, I round off my discussion of carnival, space and gay/queer identities by weaving together the various discursive strands that were dealt with throughout this thesis. I briefly summarise the role that the *Cape Town Pride Parade* plays and has played in the historical and contemporary narration of sexual identity. However, the aim of this 'conclusive' chapter is not to unite the various carnivalesque narrations of identity and space into a coherent, seamless whole. Contemporary carnival, as exemplified by the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, reveals a complex process through which issues regarding space and identity are grappled with. My own investigation of carnival is confined to these contradictions that are rife in its discursive framework, and I make no endeavour of concluding my investigation by finally 'resolving' these issues. My attempt of laying bare the various processes that shape carnivalesque performances of identity and constructions of space has no such comprehensive pretensions of providing a complete and finalised précis of carnival, neither of reducing the complex and contradictory qualities of this phenomenon to a clear-cut, autonomous body of

work. Moreover, in my writing I do not aspire to present a conclusive narrative of carnival that can somehow stand outside the limitations of a Western, modernist, normative vocabulary. As carnival's narratives of transgression are often limited in the words, images and spaces that they mobilise, so too is my own investigation fraught with the vocabulary and normative discourses I attempt to write against.

The aim is to trace the *processes* of retrieving, using and discarding that occur in spatial narrations of carnivalesque identity, rather than to fuse these often contradictory narrations into a single *product*. Emphasis is placed on various acts of appropriation as contingent on different circumstances. I demonstrate that carnivalesque enactments of identity are expressed in divergent visual, physical forms since they have their roots in changing processes of appropriation. My discussion of carnival therefore concludes that the contradicting and ambiguous force of carnival, and the visual mobilisation of changing gay/queer identities, should be seen as dynamic and unstable processes of identity reformation.

## CHAPTER 1

### CARNIVAL THEORISED

In this chapter I investigate the theorisation of carnival that informs contemporary writings on carnivalesque identity. As no academic inquiry into contemporary carnival can bypass the monumental influence of Mikhail Bakhtin in this theoretical field, I outline Bakhtin's concept of the 'carnavalesque' as cardinal to my own formulation of contemporary carnival. I also discuss reactions to Bakhtin's formulation of carnival and the numerous critical voices that took issue with aspects of his approach. My own theoretical stance, which incorporates some of these criticisms, will become clear in the process.

#### CHAPTER 1.1: BAKHTIN AND CARNIVAL

In order to gauge the effect of contemporary carnival on identity politics and its various expressions, the roots of this phenomenon are investigated in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's historical account of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin, a Russian literary critic and scholar who wrote during the rule of Stalin, developed an account of carnival that implicitly challenged Stalinism's extreme modernising programme. Bakhtin proposed that carnival was an expression of alternative political agendas and a temporary suspension of normative order during this repressive regime.<sup>10</sup> Carnival is presented by Bakhtin as a form of counterculture, of revolution, within official and repressive systems. Providing one of the first comprehensive descriptions of the carnivalisation of society, Bakhtin employs medieval popular culture as the focal point of his analysis of the literary works of Renaissance author Francois Rabelais. In *Rabelais and His World* (1968), Bakhtin explores Francois Rabelais's *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1936, first published in 1532) as a guiding text that provides seminal information as to the

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<sup>10</sup> According to Renate Lachmann, Bakhtin's formulation of the carnivalesque can be seen as indicative of his own marginalised status in Soviet society – Bakhtin was banished from the centre of official Soviet culture due to his involvement in revolutionary and anti-dogmatist writings, and he even lived in exile for a period of time (1988: 116). Bakhtin's own marginalised status made him acutely aware of the ossification of the Soviet system, and subsequently he developed the notion of conflicting cultural forces. These forces can be recognised as centrifugal and centripetal drives – while the centripetal is a force which favours univocalisation, closure, standardisation and the hegemonic monopolising of space, the centrifugal is a countering force which favours ambivalence and transgression. Bakhtin recognised the latter as integral to the properties of carnival and its opposition to normative systems of power – an issue which I address in Chapter 2 in my discussion of carnival's reaction to the city and its hegemonic structures.

disruption of social hierarchies and the inversion of categories of symbolic order.<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin describes the social and cultural rationale of carnival as grounded in its capacity to reverse social hierarchies and to cross various boundaries (whether physical, political, social, or cultural) for a limited period of time. The anarchic and liberating qualities of carnival as originally presented by Rabelais are stressed by Bakhtin as being forms of subversion that threatens to destabilise authority and order. Bakhtin's carnival is therefore a revolutionary force that is not only echoed in the medieval Europe described by Rabelais, but is also revealed in contemporary carnival.

The Bakhtinian notion of carnival entails an inversion of official order, a questioning of authority and a suspension of hierarchy – all of which emphasise the transgressive properties of carnivalesque movements. These transgressions allow not only the temporary suspension of normative order during which the rational world is turned upside-down, but carnival, as opposed to official parades, celebrate “temporary liberation from prevailing truth and from established order” as it marks “the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions” and is hostile to all that is “immortalised and completed” (Bakhtin 1968: 10). The transgressive properties of carnival do not only inhere in the reversibility of symbolic order, but also in the ardent opposition to the tropes of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘completion’. The process of ‘becoming’ is rather emphasised by Bakhtin as indicative of the carnivalesque character:

This experience [carnival], opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretence at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the

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<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin's analysis of Rabelais's work reveals clear parallels between the folk cultures of the Middle Ages and the Russian society of the early 20'th century – in both these spheres carnival presented an unofficial, satirised spectacle that mimicked serious rituals. Bakhtin presents Rabelais's work as an edifying text that designates the carnivals of medieval Europe as “sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonies... [these carnivals] offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year” (1968: 5-6). Besides carnival proper and official ceremonies, the medieval public also participated in carnival festivities and comic spectacles, such as the “feast of the fools” (*festa stultorum*) and the “feast of the ass” during which official (ecclesiastical) rituals were parodied (1968: 5). To both Bakhtin and Rabelais, the mimicry of serious rituals were important events as they presented the possibility of transgression, inversion and disruption for not only Rabelais's medieval subject, but even for Bakhtin's audience and future societies; the relevance of which will be demonstrated in my discussion of contemporary carnival.

sense of the gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the inside out (*à l'envers*), of the turnabout, of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a world inside out (Bakhtin 1968: 1).

The influence of the playful carnival spirit is recognised in the suspension of certain norms and prohibitions which would be found in 'normal' life; it not only makes the carnivalesque subject renounce his/her official state, but it also lays bare to him/her what Bakhtin refers to as the "laughing aspect" of the world which is usually obscured by everyday life (1968: 8). Bakhtin particularly emphasised the latter aspect of carnival – its all revealing and all including "laughter" which creates a "second life" outside officialdom and the ordinary. To Bakhtin, "carnavalesque laughter" (1968: 11) frees the participant from ecclesiastic dogmatism and normative responsibility, and it revives and renews life during carnival:

Let us say a few words about the complex nature of carnival laughter. It is, first of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated comic event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second...it is directed to all and everyone, including the carnival's participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent; it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives. Such is the laughter of carnival. Let us enlarge upon the second important trait of the people's festive laughter: that it is also directed at those who laugh. The people do not exclude themselves from the wholeness of the world. They, too, are incomplete, they also die and are revived and renewed (Bakhtin 1968: 11-12).

Carnival thus serves a socially integrative purpose that is manifested in acts of both affirmation and negation – the participants consciously assert their own carnivalesque identity while they act out against and repudiate officialdom and hegemonic institutions. Carnival is constituted in terms of the participants and the cultural attributes that they mobilise, as well as



official, institutionalised hegemony that is disrupted and counteracted. Since it both sustains and repudiates cultural structures, carnival is noted for ambivalence and is often contradictory in nature. Bakhtin ascribes this quality to carnival's "universal nature"<sup>12</sup> which reflects the "social consciousness of all people" that liberates man "not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear that developed in man during thousands of years: fear of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power" (1968: 92, 94). This liberatory and all-encompassing nature of the carnivalesque is presented as a means to thwart the intolerance, fanaticism and pedantry of official order by providing a platform for the display of disavowal. The opposition between the unofficial culture of carnival and the official culture of normative order as it is presented by Bakhtin, also reflects the carnivalesque resistance of monovalence through an emphasis on ambivalence. Carnival and festive laughter suspend structures of exclusion, it "dissolves them in ambivalence"; dogma, hegemony, and authority are thus undermined through ridicule (Lachman 1988: 130).

Additionally foregrounded in carnival's counteraction of hegemonic institutions is the establishment of unity between participants – carnival invites the transgression and renegotiation of boundaries between both societal and material bodies.<sup>13</sup> "In this whole [created by carnival] the individual body ceases to a certain extent to be itself; it is possible, so to say, to exchange bodies, to be renewed. At the same time the people become aware of their sensual, material bodily unity and community" (Bakhtin 1968: 255). Carnival is thus

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<sup>12</sup> In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin repeatedly calls attention to the so-called universal character of carnival – he specifically regards carnival laughter as being universal in scope and "not directed against isolated negative aspects of reality but against all reality, against the finite world as a whole" (1968: 42). This universalist assumption takes on a somewhat utopian quality in Bakhtin's line of reasoning – carnival consciousness is epitomised as the common principle that "frees human consciousness" and destroys "all pretence of an extratemporal meaning" (Bakhtin 1968: 49). In this problematic supposition carnival's own contingency seems to be overlooked in favour of a more grandiose version in which the universal and the unanimous are presented as prerequisites for carnival's own manifestation. I will critique this supposition in my discussion of global normative regulations with regards to carnival and sexual identity in Chapter 4.3.

<sup>13</sup> The material bodily principle plays a dominant role in Bakhtin's articulation of carnival laughter, specifically the body as it is presented in the genre of grotesque realism. Carnival laughter and grotesque realism bear striking similarities according to Bakhtin, and he associates both these concepts with degradation and the lower bodily stratum, "that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body" (1968: 19-20). Both societal and material bodies are depicted as forms in process that are constantly shifting and being renegotiated, rather than completed products. This image of the body in process is central to the queering of corporeal and spatial conceptions in the private and public realms, as discussed in Chapter 4.1.3.1.

ultimately stressed by Bakhtin as a transgressive movement that is employed in continuous processes of identity, corporeal and spatial (re)construction.

## CHAPTER 1.2: BAKHTIN'S CARNIVAL CONTESTED

These assertions of renewal, disruption and ambivalence which permeate Bakhtin's work are central to my own analysis of carnival's transgressive properties. Yet, there are signs that Bakhtin's carnivalesque is spirit fading in present-day society through the reduction of carnival to "innocuous revelry" and its "usurpation by bourgeois culture" (Lachmann 1988: 121). It is therefore imperative to gauge whether this phenomenon can still be regarded as disruptive of the normative. However, that the Bakhtinian notion of the carnivalesque still holds sway can be observed in the proliferation of literature focusing on the relevance of this theory in social and cultural studies. That the response to his work ranges from critical dissent to avid renegotiations of carnivalesque properties indicates the degree to which this debate has not been resolved.

Much of the early work on carnival took the form of anthropological studies of festivals and celebratory activities – the work of Lippert (1931), Geertz (1973) and Turner (1968) are examples of a somewhat conservative functionalist view which positions carnival as a prototype of the immutability of social structures rather than a potential site of transgression.<sup>14</sup> While these earlier Western interpretations contradict Bakhtin's work by being conservative (and often prejudiced) in their treatment of carnival, later carnivalesque readings criticise Bakhtin for being *too* uncritical and utopian in his own formulation of carnival, and thereby ignoring the inherently conservative and regulatory composition of festive and celebratory activities. Robert Young, for example, draws attention to the uncritical and sometimes utopian

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<sup>14</sup> This conservative view tends to reinforce normative structures within society by specifically ignoring the transformative qualities of carnival. The supposed cohesiveness and continuity of carnival activities is rather emphasised by "linking the present with rites going back to 'time out of mind'" (White 1987: 239; see also Russo 1992). Texts dealing with issues concerning social history, such as those produced by Turner (1968; 1982), underwrites a traditionalist image of carnival and an essentialised, transhistorical view in which it is posited as a form of stability. For Turner, carnivals and festivals are sites of 'folkloric' study that, when scrutinised, reveal certain 'essential' properties or even 'truths' that are transhistorical in nature (1982: 12-16). Meanwhile, for Julius Lippert, carnival and festival activities are primarily forms of 'overindulgence' that occur on a 'low level' of culture. This is evident, according to Lippert, in the 'barbaric disposition' of certain cultures where, "as soon as man is freed from the cares of the moment, he is disposed to enjoy life with boisterous hilarity when any impulse overcomes his natural inertia" (1931: 46). The academic study of carnival is known for 'origin hunting' which attempts to rationalise carnival through its supposed derivation in some remote (utopian or barbaric) past.

incorporation of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque into current critical practise by arguing that carnival is in fact seldom a liberatory activity, but rather tends to be conservative in nature (1986).<sup>15</sup> In the same vein, Carl Lindahl gives an account of Bakhtin's failings by drawing attention to what he calls the conscious "refashioning" and "exaggeration" of carnivalesque transgression that is "seldom, if ever, achieved in its enactment" (1996: 57)<sup>16</sup>. Terry Eagleton is also critical of Bakhtin's theorisation of carnival:

Carnival is, of course, a spasmodic, officially licensed affair, without the rancour, discipline and organisation essential for an effective revolutionary politics. Any politics which predicates itself on the carnivalesque moment alone will be no more than a compliant, containable libertarianism (1982: 89-90).

Carnival's embodiment is emphasised by these authors as neither totally transgressive nor liberatory, but a mere reestablishment of hierarchy through which power structures are duplicated or reaffirmed. Bakhtin is thus criticised for the idealisation, utopianism and populism that creep into his account of antihierarchical and antidogmatist carnival. Critics of Bakhtin question whether carnival could ever be realised as a horizontally ordered sphere that is free from hegemonic regulations. *Rabelais and His World* is criticised for its excessive idealisation of carnival's "joyful relativity" and accused of being little more than a "prettified, emasculated version" of its participants' celebrations (Holquist & Clark 1984: 310), while the veracity of Bakhtin's account of medieval carnival has also been queried (Dentith 1995; White 1987).<sup>17</sup> With Bakhtin's work often considered an open site for the study of the transgression

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<sup>15</sup> Young is of the opinion that "carnival cannot be both parodic, subversive of the official ideology...and an uncensored realm of free expression", but that carnival's dispersal of hegemonic order is severely limited (1986: 76-77). The contradictions that form part of carnival's make-up are, according to Young, too vast to allow any significant opposition to normative order.

<sup>16</sup> By testing Bakhtin's social construction of Renaissance carnivals in contemporary *Mardi Gras* enactments in Louisiana, Lindahl comes to the conclusion that carnivalesque oppositions to elite cultural institutions as it is described by Bakhtin do not take into account contemporary (re)establishments of hegemonic structures (1996). According to Lindahl, Bakhtin, in his treatment of carnival as a wholly transgressive event, does not take into account the self-imposed carnivalesque constructions of normative order by its own participants, as it is often seen in contemporary carnival activities (1996: 60-62).

<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin has been criticised for not paying sufficient attention to the conservative forces of carnival that is evident in certain historic accounts of festival activities. Throughout history, several carnivals functioned as reinforcements of hierarchical norms, such as Roman carnivals which included the ritual degradation of Jews, or satirical activities through which people (especially 'promiscuous' women) who transgressed the community's sexual norms were publicly mocked (Dentith 1995: 74). Some carnivals are even known for dogmatic intolerance, acts of violence, and even murder (Dentith 1995). According to White, Bakhtin is both nostalgic and uncritically populist

of boundaries and hierarchies, literary critics, folklorists, social theorists, semioticians and even anthropologists have been criticised for their reductive employment of Bakhtin's carnival. With the carnivalesque often drawn upon as a galvanising force – used to authorise the contravention of hegemonic structures and easily assimilated theoretically – contemporary critics (such as Young as well as Stallybrass and White) have drawn attention to the superficial appropriation of Bakhtin's work. Bakhtin's easy assimilation is the principal contention of not only Young's critique, in which he asserts that “just about anyone can, and probably will, appropriate Bakhtin for just about anything” (1986: 74), but also of Stallybrass and White's rejection of the uncritical analogy that is drawn between carnival's transgressive properties and celebrations of bourgeois identities (1993).<sup>18</sup> Not only is the appropriation of Bakhtin's utopian carnival deemed problematic and a point of contention in literary circles, but the carnivalesque has also become synonymous for superficial celebrations of the plurality and autonomy of marginalised (sub)cultures. One of the most common objections to Bakhtin's notion of carnival as a form of transgression, is that official culture can actually utilise the carnivalesque as a safety-valve. Carnival acts as a mechanism which seemingly allows the temporary suspension of rank, while in reality it reinforces the bonds of authority and normative order (Dentith 1995: 73). Carnival can accordingly be rendered a mere hegemonic concession through which the marginalised participants, the ‘allowed fools’, are invited to perform identity and parade their diversity in terms of the normative order that they are actually excluded from<sup>19</sup> (see also Amkpa 1999; Balandier 1970).

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in his description of carnival, especially in his failure to acknowledge the carnivalesque practice of “displaced abjection” through which “weaker social groups such as prostitutes, ethnic and religious minorities, strangers to the locality, and indeed animals were often violently abused and demonised” (White 1987: 238). The question of whether Bakhtin's analysis of Renaissance carnival is accurate is not completely relevant to my own analysis of contemporary carnivals. I wish to determine the extent to which his theorisation of the carnivalesque is applicable to the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, so a discussion of the debate around Renaissance carnivals would be tangential to my own area of interest, which is contemporary carnival.

<sup>18</sup> Stallybrass and White are of the opinion that the carnivalesque is increasingly narrated in contemporary culture through bourgeois practices and languages (1993: 288). While carnival is usually regarded as a contestation of the bourgeoisie itself, it can actually be sublimated within the structures of normative order. “Carnival was too disgusting to endure except as a sentimental spectacle. Even then its specular identifications could only be momentary, fleeting, and partial – voyeuristic glimpses of a promiscuous loss of status and decorum which the bourgeoisie had...to deny as abhorrent in order to emerge as a distinct and ‘proper’ class” (Stallybrass & White 1993: 292).

<sup>19</sup> I deal with these hegemonic concessions to ‘perform’ during carnival in my discussion of the relationship between the spectators and the participants in Chapter 4.2.

### CHAPTER 1.3: CONTEMPORARY CARNIVAL AND ENACTMENTS OF AMBIVALENCE

Even though Bakhtin's account of carnival may seem overly indulgent in terms of the utopian scenario that it outlines, some of Bakhtin's critics (such as Young and Eagleton) fail to take into account Bakhtin's own apprehension of carnival as a mere ruse to mask hegemonic power structures.<sup>20</sup> On closer inspection, Bakhtin's own formulation of the carnivalesque actually reveals a more tempered account which acknowledges ambivalence and contradiction without reinforcing totalising notions of carnival as either being completely free of conservative expressions, or totally conforming to normative regulation. Bakhtin's work thus acknowledges the ambivalent nature of carnival within the theoretical framework of rationalism and modernity<sup>21</sup> as he is cautious of perpetuating binary constructions when dealing with the contradictions initiated in carnival activities. Even theorists who position themselves within a poststructuralist framework and who disapprove of Bakhtin's supposedly 'uncritical' and 'unresolved' management of the carnivalesque (such as Young and Lindhal), fail to notice the nuanced portrayal of seemingly contradictory elements in *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin specifically avoids the reduction of the divergent aspects of carnival identity to a series of

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<sup>20</sup> Bakhtin actually acknowledges that carnival can perpetuate hegemonic structures by being usurped by official culture. By using the example of two Russian tsars, Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great, Bakhtin demonstrates that carnival was usurped by these rulers to mime the liberating qualities of unofficial festivals, thereby sanctioning state and church authority (1986: 270-277). Drawing on Bakhtin's work, Renate Lachmann is of the contention that the usurped carnival can even be seen as a "theatre of cruelty" through which official power and its hierarchical rigor is exerted (Lachmann 1988: 122, 124). Carnival is thus rendered an institutionalised cultural activity, devoid of its liberating, ambivalent and transgressive properties.

<sup>21</sup> Certain critics – such as Castle (1986) and Dentith (1995) – have argued that carnival on its own is too particular a topic to be read as representative of social or cultural history, and should rather be seen as a topos that corresponds to the European transition to modernity. Carnival represents the epochal attitudes towards notions such as 'authority' and 'civilisation', and reflects the "successive displacements and repressions" of carnivalesque behaviour "under the baleful influences of rationalism and modernity from the seventeenth century onwards" (Dentith 1995: 66, 78). The subjugation of carnival consciousness under modernist and Enlightenment discourse is also a point of reference for Bakhtin in his analysis of the misinterpretation of Rabelais's work. According to Bakhtin, this misinterpretation reveals the "weak rather than the strong points of the Enlightenment...[the latter] had a lack of historical sense, an abstract and rationalist utopianism, a mechanistic conception of matter, a tendency to abstract generalisation and typification on one hand, and to documentation on the other hand" (1968: 116). Enlightenment accentuations of abstract rationalism and cogitative reason are not only epitomised by Bakhtin as the antithesis of carnivalesque consciousness, but are actively subverted in *Rabelais and His World* through the acknowledgement of the multiplicity and ambivalence of carnival activities.

binary oppositions, and instead of merely treating carnival as a form of inversion he targets the very structures that initiated hierarchical distinction.<sup>22</sup>

Bakhtin's account of the carnivalesque as a trope of transgression is by no means flawless and he undoubtedly succumbs to the allure of idealisation, yet the contradictions and ambivalences which seem to permeate his work (and which are central to my own analysis of the carnivalisation of queer identity and space within the South African context) need not be read as a shortcoming. Bakhtin does not provide a resolution for the inconsistencies found in carnival. His work rather seems to be intentionally open and guarded about conclusions – instead of presenting his own voice as a determining and finalising authority, he places particular emphasis on a multivocal<sup>23</sup> approach to the carnivalesque. Bakhtin's multivocal formulation of carnival is used as a basis for my own analysis of contemporary carnival activities. Like Bakhtin, I do not wish to provide a conclusive précis, nor to offer a theoretical product that would be universally applicable, but rather to stress the inherently contradictory, ambiguous, and contingent nature of South African carnival. These conflicting qualities of carnival are investigated in the following chapters by primarily focusing on the physical and conceptual configurations of identity and space that are mobilised during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

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<sup>22</sup> Bakhtin's predilection for the openness of dialogue is evident in *Rabelais and His World* which can be read as a plea for a schematic move away from dialectic thinking and binary oppositions (Holquist & Clark 1984: 7-8), towards a mode of carnivalesque transformation – this is an issue that is unpacked in much more depth in Chapter 3.3.1. This transformation is not simply a metaphor for inversion (or the mere reversal of hierarchic order), but it involves the active blurring, transgression and invasion of binary hierarchic boundaries (Hall 1996: 292). In Bakhtin's formulation of carnival, the boundaries between binary distinctions are transgressed, thus “revealing the interdependency of the low on the high and vice versa, the inextricably mixed and ambivalent nature of all cultural life” (Hall 1996: 292).

<sup>23</sup> Bakhtin underscores carnival's capacity for producing symbols or objects that are multivocal and polysemous within a particular cultural context. Bakhtin also links the multivocality of carnival to exaggeration, hyperbolism and sensory excess, all of which produce a carnivalesque discourse that “levels...[the] possibility of hierarchy and dominance through inversion, contradiction, and multiplication” and actually encourages a polyvalent “dialogue between structure and anti-structure, order and disorder” (Babcock 1974: 928; 1978: 294). Carnivalesque discourse is related in terms of sensory overload and described as a “surplus of signifiers” (Babcock 1974 & 1978; Turner 1974 & 1982), a term first formulated by Lévi-Strauss (1963) and later elaborated on by Derrida (1970) to draw attention to the nonprivileged and excessive nature of signification. Derrida argues in this regard that “a surplus of signifiers calls into question the idea of a privileged or transcendental signified implicit in serious and ‘official’ discourse and the interpretation thereof” (1970: 250). Bakhtin's carnival – with its excess of meaning, grotesque exaggerations, and distortions of official culture – thus presents an “anti-signified...discourse [that] is an insult to the signified of serious and official discourse” (Babcock 1974: 928).

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **CARNIVAL AND THE CITY:**

#### **THE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF CARNIVALESQUE SPACE**

In this chapter I explore the embodiment of carnival in spatial terms. Thus far I have treated notions such as ‘transgression’ and ‘ambivalence’, which can be regarded as exemplary of carnival activities, in abstract terms without relating them to their physical manifestation during carnival. In order to explore carnival in its embodied state I refer to its visibility in spatial terms, particularly within the ideological and physical realm of the city. As carnival and the *Cape Town Pride Parade* are the focal points of my writing, I provide a Bakhtinian analysis of carnivalesque space as a theoretical basis. Carnival, as a form of social celebration or even protest, has the capacity to lay claim to city spaces and can therefore be seen as a mechanism for certain subcultures and individuals to affirm their rights to the city and to define it as their own territory. In this chapter I therefore investigate the city as a multifarious space that is shaped by mobilisations of carnivalesque identity.

#### **CHAPTER 2.1: BAKHTIN AND SPACE**

For Bakhtin, the activity of carnival is spatially located in the marketplace. This is an area that is simultaneously metaphorical and material, and which embodies an “atmosphere of freedom, frankness, and familiarity” (Bakhtin 1968: 153). The marketplace is described by Bakhtin as the spatial centre of all that is unsanctioned; as a locale that is hostile to the hierarchy and etiquette of the church, state institutions, and private homes which dominate the spatial sphere of the city. The marketplace is not so much treated by Bakhtin as a pre-ordained site in which carnival is enacted, but rather as a territory that is created through carnival activities. Bakhtin is of the contention that carnival arises out of the relationships that are formed within the marketplace: relationships between carnival and territory, and participants and space. Carnival is thus crucial for the establishment of the marketplace and is analysed by Bakhtin in terms of various relationships that are spatially endorsed during its enactment (1968: 154).

The marketplace entails the spatial organisation of the carnivalesque crowd within a certain place (typically the city) and it is a site in which the performance of a carnivalesque identity is sanctioned. It is also an area of transgression through which other established spaces and hierarchic barriers (particularly officialdom as represented by church and state) can be

breached (1968: 153, 255). Carnavalesque space is defined as a temporary release from officialdom – for a limited time carnival's participants invert hierarchic order, take hold of official spaces and establish some degree of autonomy in the face of everyday life. Bakhtin thus defines the marketplace as a space that is both territorial and social; a simultaneously geographical and cultural phenomenon that is found in the temporary carnivalesque enactment of identity and the transgression of normative regulations. For Bakhtin, the marketplace is not so much a stable territorial construct, but rather a process of performance, transgression and appropriation.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin presents the marketplace as a space of exchange – through interaction and dialogue<sup>24</sup>, collectives can rediscover and celebrate their carnivalesque identity. This identity can be spatially constituted by transforming normative city space into a marketplace. Through subversion, mockery and laughter, the marketplace is established as an unofficial, open, popular space that exists in opposition to the official, closed spaces of the city. Any city has the capacity to be transformed into the marketplace; to erupt into a space where various transgressive narratives and identities can be exchanged. For Bakhtin, the marketplace is thus a liminal space that is visualised and enacted through the relationship between carnival, its participants and the city.

## **CHAPTER 2.2: ORTHODOX CONCEPTIONS OF THE CITY**

Contestations of notions of territorial stability, as seen in a carnivalesque approach to space, are echoed in the contemporary renegotiation of spatial and geographical theories. Texts on the subject of the physical properties of space and place have come under scrutiny for their disregard of the cultural and social dimensions which are inextricably part of most geographies. Contemporary theorisations of the city have increasingly drawn attention to a problematically modernist construction of space which prevails in literature dealing with territory and its visual properties. Notions of space as something that can be accurately surveyed and objectively theorised have been criticised for perpetuating empiricist and positivist race, gender and sexual biases. Modernist discourses of territoriality – with their emphasis on rationality and progress, and the establishment of universal laws for the scientific observation of space and place – can be traced to geographical theories which developed

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<sup>24</sup> The emphasis that Bakhtin places on dialogue as a crucial component for the establishment of identity, is of particular importance, and is discussed in Chapter 3.3.1.



from Enlightenment notions of space as essentially empirical, objective and mappable (Hubbard, Kitchin & Valentine 2004: 345-349). Space was accordingly considered to be a 'pure territory' and a 'blank canvas', and treated as an "absolute container of static, though moveable, objects" (Gleeson 1996: 390).<sup>25</sup> These discourses, driven by what Zygmunt Bauman refers to as 'cognitive spacing' (i.e. modernity's yearning for ordered and delimited geographies), reflect the institutionalisation and monitoring of space which formed the foundation of Western geographical theories (1993: 145-146). 'Scientific' studies of space and place have been instrumental in the control and annihilation of 'the other', and they are notorious for guiding the xenophobic and bigoted delineation of territory (Bauman 2000).<sup>26</sup>

Binary structures are also perpetuated in modern geography which constitutes itself through dualisms of nature/culture, inside/outside, and the supposedly obvious demarcation of space as the antithesis of place. Differentiations between space and place in geographical/scientific studies, consider space to be a mere abstraction of place or even to be a realm without any meaning, a place devoid of human investment (Cresswell 2004: 10), whereas place is seen as the actual embodiment of space, the transformation of 'empty', 'threatening' space into places of stability and security (Tuan 1977: 6).<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The Enlightenment geographies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries predominantly focus on space as an objective and mappable territory, devoid of social properties. Accordingly, space is for the most part defined in terms of Euclidian geometry, which conceives of it as a static realm that is empirically and physically constituted through 'x', 'y' and 'z' dimensions (Gleeson 1996: 390-391).

<sup>26</sup> According to Bauman (1993), social differentiations between the 'known and the 'unknown', between the 'self' and the 'stranger' or the 'other', are employed within modernist discourses to 'map' the dissimilarities between various territories and cultures. Moral and cognitive spacing derives from this differentiation as it attempts to determine a 'rightful' place for the 'self' and the 'stranger' to occupy (1993: 146). Modernity's spacing of the social landscape reflects its desire for order and its loathing of ambivalence – to 'effectively' master space, modernity's ordering strategies attempt to suspend, transform or annihilate the 'stranger' and his/her ambivalent 'otherness' (Bauman 2000: 101).

<sup>27</sup> According to Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), 'space' and 'place' are interrelated concepts to which different meanings are attached. Tuan argues that space is often treated as more 'abstract' than place, and "what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with meaning...The ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa" (1977: 6). Space is thus often conceived as 'abstract' since it apparently lacks any significance other than its strangeness, yet, Tuan asserts, it is crucial for the definition of place, which is perceived as a concrete space that is invested with meaning (1977: 199).

Binary conceptions of space/place have become increasingly blurred by the notion of 'social space' – theorists, such as Cavallaro (2001), Lefebvre (1991) and Smith (1984), drew attention to space as a discursive construct and a socially constructed entity that is entrenched in its own hegemonic structures. By presenting space as constituted in terms of multiplicity (rather than adhering to essentialist notions of space/place as empty/embodied) and by acknowledging space as shaped by complex social processes, binary structures in the conceptualisation of locality are contested. Space can thus be investigated in terms of social, cultural, political, and sexual interactions which are projected onto material manifestations of locality.

### **CHAPTER 2.3: THE CITY REVISITED: CARNIVAL AND CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF THE CITY**

Contemporary spatial theories have given rise to the notion of multiple spatialities; of space as comprising of “intersecting social, political and economic relations” and thus being “relational and contingent, experienced and understood differently by different people” (Hubbard, Kitchin & Valentine 2004: 6). By rejecting universalist definitions of space, concepts such as contingency, fluidity and multiplicity are rather emphasised in current investigations of spatiality, thus challenging notions of locality as permanent, consistent and uniform. The renegotiation of spatiality in terms of diversity acknowledges locality as not only inextricably linked to different systems of signification (whether sexual, social, cultural, etc.), but also draws attention to hegemonic practices of categorisation disposed towards the binary division of spatial properties. The geographical positioning and constitution of sexuality is one such domain that reflects the contemporary re-evaluation of normative and polarised spaces. My research aims at a disruption of classificatory systems that are still prevalent in contemporary theorisations of visual culture and its spatial manifestation. I therefore deal with processes of inversion and disorder which can be identified in the carnivalesque challenge of binary oppositions that are perpetuated in many theories of space. Whereas one could contest dichotomous and essentialist concepts of space on purely theoretical/abstract grounds, carnival and its disruptive properties offer the opportunity to challenge such rigid conceptions of space in visual terms.

It is the disruptive nature of carnival, its capacity to simultaneously invert centralised systems of power and to affirm individual or group identities, that blurs the spatial boundaries between

what is usually seen as respectable and stable spaces (the city and urban infrastructures), and its itinerant and transient inhabitants (the celebrating or protesting participants of carnival). This process is marked by a sense of 'violence' that has been ritualised in the contemporary carnival scene, and that pervades the whole notion of the carnivalesque in such a way that it actually emphasises the potency of carnival to oppose the order and restrictions of the city or the 'centre'. Milla Riggio argues that:

Carnival does not initially seem to belong to the 'city' as we usually think of it. By affirming the values of neighbourhood and community, carnival may be said in a sense to bring the village, in the form of the neighbourhood, the ghetto, the family, the community, into the city. Carnival, thus, affirms not only the restorative value of festivity but also a concept of cultural and individual history, seen not as the story of public institutions, centralised governments, systems of law and order...but as the encoding and imprinting of genetic, cultural and artistic legacies, of cultural memory embodied in dance, music, and fantasy (2004: 20).

The city as a space – as a physical, social or cultural structure that creates its own boundaries and imposes its own order – can be thus investigated in order to understand how the participants of carnival react to or even mobilise against the ideological structure of 'city'. The city provides not only a sense of stability, but a space within which human identity can be formulated in terms of the physical environment it is situated in. Whereas the physical movement of the participants of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* plays an integral part in the constitution and mobilisation of identity, it is also important to acknowledge these participants as physical entities that move within the largely static and immobile sphere of Cape Town. This construction of identity in relation to the physical sphere of the city is highly dependant on the projection of a certain sense of space that constitutes a human being's perception of and relation to forms and objects.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Theorists in the field of Human Geography have been particularly interested in the relationship between the moving human and his/her motionless surroundings. Tarmo Pasto (1964) is one such writer who argues that the human being can be regarded as a vertically moving object that, while being supported by gravity, physically transports itself from one place to another. This movement also contributes to feelings of emotional and physical security that are determined by a person's establishment of a "motor relationship" with other moving or static forms and objects (Pasto 1964: 18). Human beings can accordingly be seen as motorial objects that set up a relationship with their environment by creating and projecting a personal space around themselves (Pasto 1964: 16). This personal space acts as a stabilising medium within which perception, expression and movement can be controlled by individuals and within which human beings can ensure their own emotional stability and safety by

The city is a highly complex structure and is often perceived as a geographically demarcated and physically constituted entity. In this sense the city has served an important function within Western philosophical thought and its discursive reiteration of the supposedly dichotomous spheres of the sociocultural and the natural (Fincher, Jacobs & Anderson 2002: 11-12). Formulated in terms of human and sociocultural characteristics, the city has acquired an essential character which positions it in opposition to nature. The city is frequently presented in Western discourse as a physical entity that embodies the culmination of social and cultural achievement. The meta-narratives of 'civilisation' and 'progressive settlement' so central to modernist discourses, are typified by the premise of the city as a bastion of humanity, as a civilised enclosure that protects its inhabitants "from an apparently untamed wilderness beyond" (Fincher, Jacobs & Anderson 2002: 37).<sup>29</sup> The demarcation of the boundaries of city space, as a physical enunciation of the supposed polarity between the city (culture) and rural surroundings (nature), is achieved by the spatial mapping of urban spaces. Modernist urban planning can be seen as a prime example of the way in which the city is utilised as a mechanism to enforce discipline, control, social solidarity, cohesion and a sense of territorial belonging on a spatial scale (Fincher, Jacobs & Anderson 2002: 41). The city has accordingly been employed as a spatial structure that can aid in the segmentation and control of population groups in order to create a form of cohesion and reduce urban disorder.

This essentialised notion of the city as the epitome of modernist achievement is, however, countered by its very structures. In this regard Arjun Appadurai argues that, while the city provides a space in which a supposedly stable locality is realised, the production of locality is actually a very fragile social achievement that has increasingly come under siege in modern societies (1996: 179). The production of locality is fragile, and has to be carefully maintained

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establishing themselves as dynamic and controlling centers of meaning (Pasto 1964: 16-17). The way in which individuals move and transport themselves (during the physical movement that carnival entails, for example) can therefore be seen as a means of establishing a sense of personal space, setting up a relationship with the environment, and constituting a stable identity.

<sup>29</sup> The city is regarded in this instance as a cultural structure that has "lifted itself out of nature", and the natural is accordingly "depicted as an essence which humanity has heroically managed to hold outside the city boundaries" (Fincher, Jacobs & Anderson 2002: 37). This dichotomous view of nature and the city has its roots in the Greco-Roman conception of the *polis*, an independent, unified and usually walled city which was governed as a city-state and consisted of both rural and urban areas. This perception of the city as the culmination of humanity and a beacon of cultural, political a social achievement, reached its height during the discursive and physical implementation of colonialism and modernity (Fincher, Jacobs & Anderson 2002: 37).

through the creation of boundaries to counter the instability of social life (Appadurai 1996: 179, 184). Appadurai states that, in order to produce locality, “space and time are themselves socialised and localised through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation, and action” (1996: 180). The ephemeral qualities of locality are therefore assuaged by placing emphasis on its materiality. Space and time are important elements to ground locality within a certain context and to aid in the physical translation of an abstract locality into a tangible territory. The city, as a physical product of locality that demonstrates the demarcation and delineation of space and time, can be regarded as a locus of power, as a ‘universal’ physical and/or demographic structure (Marshall 1998: 684) through which hegemonic powers manifest. This production of locality via the city is therefore dependant on the manipulation, construction and representation of certain material and symbolic structures.

#### **CHAPTER 2.4: CAPE TOWN AS CONTESTED SPACE: CARNIVAL AND THE CITY**

The construction of the city as a sphere of stability – as a material manifestation of space and time that is constrained and manipulated by means of physical structures – presents certain problematical assumptions about the allegedly ‘universal’ and ‘essential’ qualities of the city and its inhabitants. In order to counter these assumptions and present an alternative perspective on city space, this thesis contests the city’s hegemonic structures by investigating the phenomenon of carnival as disruptive of such an essentialist (and, as I will demonstrate, heteronormative) view of Cape Town. Carnival, as a form of social celebration and protest, has the capacity to lay claim to city spaces and can therefore be seen as a mechanism for certain subcultures and individuals to redefine their idea of city and to affirm their territorial rights to this space.

Cape Town as an ideological space bears the scars of (hetero)normative oppression, especially as it was inflicted during apartheid on the non-white, non-straight society. Lgbt identities have been largely controlled and repressed by the apartheid regime in South Africa – racist legislation and specifically (homo)sexual policing were sites for political struggle for (inter alia) lgbt individuals and subcultures during the rule of the Nationalist government (Retief 1994: 100). Racism and homophobia were clearly evident in sexual and racial policing within the Cape Town and larger South African sphere:

Racist legislation and iron-fisted rule have, since the earliest days of Nationalist government, gone hand-in-hand with an obsessive interest in sexual policing. This policing has been based on the values of Christian Nationalist apartheid ideology: the need to keep the white nation sexually and morally pure so that it had the strength to resist the black communist onslaught (Retief 1994: 100).

During the rule of the Nationalist government, Cape Town was a site of severe homosexual discrimination and oppression<sup>30</sup> – the apartheid policy (and specifically the *Immorality Act* of 1957) not only produced “uncertainty in people’s emotional and sexual existence”, but also determined the legal position of the lgbt population (Isaacs & McKendrick 1992: 92, 146). During this period the South African criminal law deemed homosexual behaviour ‘unnatural’ and a ‘crime’ against morality – it was legal to *be* homosexual, but illegal and ‘immoral’ to engage in homosexual activities (i.e. sexual practices) (Isaacs & McKendrick 1992: 146, 150). By drawing on the rhetoric of moral purity, the state motivated police action against the so-called ‘homosexual danger’ (Retief 1994: 100).<sup>31</sup> In the geography of the city, the police justified their repressive measures by treating homosexual activities in public places as a ‘nuisance’, and transgressors who offended were charged on the grounds of ‘public indecency’ or ‘immoral soliciting’ (Retief 1994: 106). Gay/queer spaces in Cape Town, ranging from bars where lgbt subcultures congregated to public toilets where gay men cruised, were prone to police raids, with the ‘offenders’ incarcerated and their identities often published in the media. Within this repressive context, lgbt identities were often visually repressed or erased in order to avoid persecution, and feelings of insecurity pervaded these identity constructions.

Apartheid’s obsession with racial purity added to the normative regulation of Cape Town’s city structure. The *Group Areas Acts* of 1950 and 1957 were used, for example, to declare the inner city white, which led to the displacement of large groups of ‘coloured’ people. With the gay subcultural scene primarily located in the centre of Cape Town, the segregation of races had a severe influence on lgbt identities as it “produced an effect of uncertainty in people’s emotional and sexual existence, creating a sense cultural crisis” (Isaacs & McKendrick 1992:

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<sup>30</sup> Even before the rule of the Nationalist government, homosexuals in South Africa were treated not only as a marginalised group, but as an abomination. During the rule of the Dutch East India Company (VOC) in the Cape Colony, several men (mostly slaves and Dutchmen) were executed for engaging in ‘sodomy’ by being tied together and drowned in the sea at Table Bay (*Queer History* 2004.)

<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 4.2.2.2.1 for a deconstruction of the concept of ‘police’ in contemporary carnival activities.

92). Apartheid legislation also led to the polarisation of lgbt identities in terms of race and Cape Town's exclusionary city space entrenched the establishment of white hegemony.<sup>32</sup> Racialised, heteronormative processes thus shaped the city's physical as well as ideological structure.

The appropriation of city space through carnival can be seen as a way for the members of Cape Town's lgbt subcultures to temporarily reclaim parts of the city as their own – an act that constitutes an important shift in agency when considering the marginal status that has been historically ascribed to these identities. The physical movement through the city that carnival allows its participants give these marginalised individuals and subcultures the opportunity to act on issues like displacement and restrictions that have previously been enforced on them. Within this context, I view these participating subcultures' attempt to counter displacement, through counter-cultural identity constructions and carnivalesque mobilisations, as similar to diaspora<sup>33</sup>. Diasporic cultures/movements create a sense of solidarity by placing emphasis on factors such as group belonging and the ideological and/or physical repossession and renegotiation of 'home' (the centre from which they were marginalised) (Mohan 2002: 88). In a similar fashion Cape Town's city structure is temporarily reclaimed through the use of carnival by the members of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* in a bid to assert their right to

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<sup>32</sup> I discuss this issue in Chapter 4.3.1.1 when I investigate Cape Town's 'Gay Village' as an example of discriminatory racial discourses and hegemonic practices that are perpetuated within the city.

<sup>33</sup> Giles Mohan defines diasporas as "fragile transnational communities which often have to negotiate harsh new environments and frequently choose to connect with, and seek security from, people identified, in some way, as 'the same'. Such connections are cultural in the sense that 'sameness' is a perception rooted in practices and traditions as well as, more problematically, in race" (2002: 79). Lgbt constructions of subcultural identities during *Pride Parades* can be seen as a form of cultural diaspora. These diasporas, which are constituted through shared cultural codes and styles which unite their divergent, de-territorialised members, are defined in terms of their exclusion and marginalisation from an original 'centre' (Mohan 2002: 2-3). Lgbt subcultures can therefore be regarded as *ideologically*, rather than *physically*, displaced. I am aware that the term diaspora usually suggests "a dislocation from the nation-state or geographical location of origin and a relocation in one or more nation-states, territories, or countries", and that, as Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur cautions, an "uncritical, unreflexive application of the term 'diaspora' to any and all contexts of global displacement and movement...become imperialist gestures" (2003: 1-3). I am, however, of the opinion that the nationalist government of South Africa created conditions, erected boundaries, and enforced displacement to such an extent that lgbt subcultures are in many ways similar to diasporas who were dislocated from national structures and institutions. I also support the Braziel and Mannur's claim that understandings of diaspora should move from essentialist notions of homeland and geographical location to the deployment of this term to encompass conceptual and more hybrid structures of home (2003: 6). In this manner the idea of an 'authentic' geographical place of residence from which a community/subculture has to be dislocated, can be countered by treating spheres of home as 'bastardised', hybrid states of displacement, rather than stable geographical products.

actively disrupt the order of the city centre. The city, as a physical product of locality that demonstrates the demarcation and delineation of materiality, is therefore renegotiated during carnival that contests the concept of the city as a bastion of stable and cohesive space. The city as a basis of settlement and stasis is furthermore challenged by physical movements (inter alia carnivalesque mobilisations) within its parameters. In this manner carnival brings to light the paradoxical duality of cities, the tension between settlement and movement which renders the city a fluid entity rather than a stable product.<sup>34</sup>

The fluidity of the city is demonstrated during the *Cape Town Pride Parade's* movement beyond the physical parameters of the city centre into 'marginalised' areas. Both the 2007 and 2008 *Pride Parades* were organised to consist of both a 'main' carnival, situated in the city centre, and a 'fringe' carnival, situated in a township area (such as Guguletu). Even in contemporary Cape Town, access to the city during carnival presents a physical and ideological dilemma to the largely black population situated in the townships. Access to carnival is a problem since the movement of groups of people and their floats to the city is logistically and financially difficult to orchestrate. With the city also being considered the ideological domain of the centred, and South Africa still moving out of an era of white supremacy and racist legislation, it is understandable that Cape Town may still present to some an ideological barrier that is difficult to cross.

For that reason, 'fringe' carnivals were initiated as a means to provide contact with the *Cape Town Pride Parade* without necessarily moving it to a new location. As a result, this carnival can act in multiple spaces, not being disruptive to *either* the city/centre *or* the townships/periphery, but both. The strategy is thus twofold, with carnival actively incorporating the spaces of the marginalised and laying bare the hegemonic (and racist) processes which influenced the design of distinctive centred and marginal spaces. Carnival thus acts as a reminder of the oppression that not only created the city as an ideologically and physically separate sphere, but that also created the peripheral townships by driving the racially marginalised out of the city. By incorporating both the centred and marginal spaces, carnival acts as a disruptive force that destabilises the binary ingrained conception of conflicting localities, thereby presenting

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<sup>34</sup> This 'paradoxical duality' of cities can be perceived, according to Ash Amin and Stephen Gray, in the way that they are, on the one hand, "fluid collections of people who, through movement and migration, arrive in and move through city streets as strangers to each other; on the other hand cities are composed of a series of 'urban villages'... [of people] who live much of their lives in a relatively bounded locality" (1999: 96).



carnavalesque spaces as multiple instead of singular. Consequently, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* shifts the realms of the marketplace beyond the borders of the city into the township. The carnivalesque establishment of marketplace, the domain where identities and narratives can be exchanged, is enacted in multiple spaces. As the identities and narratives that are exchanged within carnivalesque marketplaces are granted more space for exposure, so carnival adapts to the needs of integration and wider recognition. To the same extent that the normative regulation of city and space is broadly distributed, carnival is allowed to extend its marketplaces into various localities – as Cape Town is increasingly contested as a site of racial and sexual restriction, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is granted more access to spaces that were previously off-limit for expressions and renegotiations of identity.

## CHAPTER 2.5: CAPE TOWN AND THE LIMITS OF CARNIVAL

Yet, even though these transgressive carnivalesque qualities are exemplified by the *Cape Town Pride Parade's* occupation of multiple spaces, the very creation of 'fringe' events in 'marginal' townships can actually perpetuate hegemonic centrality. While it is laudable that the spatial repertoire of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* was extended to include those spaces and persons who were disavowed by apartheid, by constantly reminding all that these constituents are of secondary status may do more harm than good. These spaces are fringed by name<sup>35</sup>, and it can (intentionally or inadvertently) reemphasise the primary status of the centred (mostly white) participants in the city, and the subordinate position of the (black) township participants. This act of fringing (that I elaborate on in Chapter 4.3) indicates the establishment of new hierarchies within the ideological and physical space of Cape Town.

These spatial contradictions can also be noted in carnival's physical relationship to the city – the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is simultaneously rebellious towards the city as an ideologically constituted entity, while it also knowingly yields to the very normative processes which it so detests in the city structure. The *Cape Town Pride Parade* is often regarded as exemplary of transgression and liberation, which can be ascribed to the largely utopian (Bakhtinian) account

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<sup>35</sup> I attended several meetings in 2007 and 2008 during which the *Pride Parades* were planned. I contend that the naming of these events as 'fringe' was an unfortunate choice made by the organisers who appeared to be genuinely interested in creating multiple carnivals which could address the needs of different (sub)cultures. Within townships where the lgbt population is still largely ostracised, these 'fringe' carnivals can function as a tool for creating more visibility and acceptance. Yet, by choosing a name for these carnivals that discursively perpetuate the marginalised status of those people who live within townships, the democratic visibility that is professed by the *Cape Town Pride Parade* committee, is negated.

of carnival as indicative of human agency in the face of hegemonic oppression. Yet, the privileges that carnival can claim in terms of spatial authority, is actually limited. My own involvement with the preparation of the 2008 *Cape Town Pride Parade* has revealed the latter to be highly dependant on the sanctioning power of the city. The streets that this carnival so daringly 'invades' are booked months in advance by the organisers, and it actually appears to be planned in terms of 'least disturbance'. The parade is designed so as to accommodate the inhabitants of the city – the route that is followed is not merely chosen to provide its participants with 'liberating access' to the centre of the city, but also to inflict the least disruption on 'normal' city life. Sound pollution is kept at the minimum and the 'respectable' inhabitants of the city have to give permission to the organisers of the carnival to use one of the streets for the notoriously boisterous after-party. The 'violence' of carnival as it 'spontaneously disrupts' and 'reclaims' the city is subdued by the traffic cops who guide the procession of people from the point of departure to the place of arrival.<sup>36</sup> All floats that are admitted on the streets have to be formally registered (at a small fee of course), and no alcohol is allowed on the streets (it is reserved for the after-party, hence the boisterousness of this event). All in all, the impact of this carnival, of the space that is so adamantly 'reclaimed', seems to be diminished by the very organised nature of the parade. It is most likely that if this carnival was not structured in such a manner, it would not be allowed on the streets of the city *at all*. Bakhtin's drunk, defecating and swearing horde who were supposedly free to roam and seize the streets of the city, is replaced by a regulated crowd that hides its booze in cooler bags from the ever-present traffic-cops. The *Cape Town Pride Parade* is served on a clipboard – an event so organised and meticulously planned that it is turned into a day of pussyfooting without any (delicious) cock-ups.

## **CHAPTER 2.6: BACK TO THE MARKETPLACE**

The spatial manifestation of contemporary carnival is riddled with ambiguities, with the production/disruption of space during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* revealing both acquiescence and resistance. Carnival's spatial demands reveal a process of negotiation with the established structures it is situated in – neither entirely yielding to nor defying the rules laid down by the city, but mostly doing both. This process is not only characterised by opposition – carnival is not a mere disruptive force that challenges the city and lays claim to all its

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<sup>36</sup> See Chapter 4.2.2.2.2 for a discussion of the carnivalesque contestation of the role that police play in the regulation and monitoring of carnival activities.

properties and rights – but also of mutual benefit to both the participants and the city. The *Cape Town Pride Parade* is marketed in South African media as a gay event that attracts tourists to the city – the city can therefore ‘use’ carnival as a means to draw tourists (and their money) to Cape Town, while the members of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* are granted a space to (temporarily) exert their limited power and perform their marginal identities. Yet, while this occupation of city space may seem to be advantageous to both the city and the participants of carnival, it may also be interpreted as a hegemonic concession to the marginal to temporarily inhabit space. The marginalised are allowed access to the streets of Cape Town as long as they perform and please – carnival is rendered a glittering safari experience allowed for the sake of the spending, spectacle loving tourists.<sup>37</sup> Cape Town is thus manifested as a contemporary marketplace where multiple identities, discourses and even currencies are traded.

The complexity of this issue, of the simultaneous give-and-take scenario of carnival's spatial enactment, is further investigated in the following chapter in which I discuss the visual presentation of carnivalesque identity. The performative aspects of identity are explored as well as issues surrounding human agency, sexual hegemony, and the corporeal expression of identity. The mobilisation of identity, as it is negotiated and embodied in carnival, is discussed by looking at the subcultural relations between different individuals and groups who perceive themselves to share certain key characteristics, such as queer sexuality.

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<sup>37</sup> This is an issue that I unpack in much more depth in Chapter 4.3.1.2.

## CHAPTER 3

### CARNIVALESQUE IDENTITY: NARRATED, PERFORMED, QUEERED

In this chapter I discuss the narration, performance and visual constitution of individual and group gay/queer identities in the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. Carnavalesque renegotiations of sexuality in the context of post-apartheid South Africa are explored for their potential to open up multiple discursive accounts of sexuality. The fluidity of identity is specifically emphasised in a bid to divert from essentialist and binary reductions of highly complex identity formations. Without reducing South Africa's multifaceted history to a teleological account of progression, and thereby presenting the change from an apartheid to a post-apartheid state as being uncomplicated and resolved in any way, the impact of this move in narrating the politics of identity and its influence on conceptions of sexuality, cannot be denied.

#### CHAPTER 3.1: SEXUAL IDENTITY AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONSTITUTION

One of the major transformations in the way that South African people of 'alternative' sexuality (i.e. sexualities that do not play themselves out as heterosexual) perceive themselves, was initiated by the new Constitution (adopted on 8 May 1996) which was the first in the world to prohibit discrimination against people on the basis of their sexuality. The new South African Constitution acted as an "enabling tool" for people who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgendered (Van Zyl 2005a: 235), and it rendered these identities 'respectable' by granting them "a space in the discourse of national belonging" (Van Zyl 2005b: 27). The Constitution thus signifies a major shift in the production and imagining of sexuality in contemporary South Africa.<sup>38</sup> It has been argued that the "very existence [of constitutional protection] has given gay society in South Africa an unprecedented vitality; a robustness that is markedly different from the marginal and subterranean lives many of us have led" (Gevisser & Cameron 1994: xi).

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<sup>38</sup> The legal position of the South African lgbt population changed dramatically after the first democratic election and the adoption of the new Constitution – according to the new Bill of Rights "everyone is equal before the law...[and] the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, *sexual orientation*, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth [my emphasis]" (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa* 1996). The autonomy and agency of lgbt people are therefore protected by the South African Constitution; the latter not only enforcing their equality and freedom of movement within Cape Town, but also allowing the active expression of their rights by means of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

Although the Constitution can be read as a narrative of liberation, protecting multiple sexual identities, the understanding of multiple sexual orientations in South Africa (and even globally) is often reduced to the old binarism of heterosexuality and its primary opposite; homosexuality. Even though the Constitution deliberately does not specify which sexual orientations are safeguarded in its Bill of Rights, it is sometimes *interpreted* as signifying 'gay' as *the only* liberated, non-straight sexual identity; something that has led to the marginalisation of other 'alternative' identities that do not identify as gay. Annie Leatt and Graeme Hendricks are of the opinion that, even though the Constitution validated multiple queer identities, processes of homonormative regulation contradict the liberal Bill of Rights by marginalising queer identities (such as drag queens and transvestites) that do not name themselves 'gay' (2005). Leatt and Hendricks argue that "while the discourse of human rights and sexual orientation is liberating for those within gay communities, this liberation is not complete...same-sex behaviours that are not expressed in gay or lesbian identities in South Africa have the potential for even further marginalisation" (2005: 304). Even though the Constitution protects all sexual orientations, a hierarchy is still often enforced within lgbt subcultures by narrating 'gay' as the most 'prominent', 'accepted' and 'natural' category for non-straight sexual identities.

'Gay' as a supposedly overarching category that encompasses all alternative sexual orientations, needs to be more critically unpacked. The reduction of 'liberated' sexual identities to a fixed description of 'gayness' needs to be more sensitively deconstructed and renegotiated by challenging homonormative idealisations of a singular gay identity. The essentialised conception of 'gay' as the antithesis of its binary opposite 'straight' (which is largely stereotyped as an 'oppressive' and 'discriminatory' category) also needs to be reinvestigated. Sexuality and its fluctuating expressions thus need to be relocated beyond the limited expressions encoded by the term 'gay'.

### **CHAPTER 3.2: GAY VS. QUEER: CURRENT DEBATES AROUND SEXUAL IDENTITY**

Such a move has been signalled by the mobilisation of queer formations of identity which are considered to be a conceptual antidote to gay essentialism. With 'gay' and 'homosexual' often being regarded as fixed and stable categories, these two terms have become rhetorical devices used to stress the 'essential' and 'universal' nature of sexuality. Essentialism is thus used

to differentiate between 'gay' and 'straight' as polarised categories of identification – as significations of innate 'core selves' that are clearly demarcated and fixed by difference (Cruikshank 1992: 28). The belief that gay is a sexual identity that can be explained biologically has also been proffered as 'proof' of its innate nature – this proposes that 'gay' is a category into which one is born, and the 'gay body' is therefore a 'natural' product.<sup>39</sup> Queer, on the other hand, is a theoretical, political and/or cultural discourse that is concerned with aspects of sexual transgression, with the rejection of fixed conceptions of sexuality, and the questioning of the normative readings and applications of both straight and gay. Queer is therefore strongly opposed to essentialist and universalist claims about gay identity (Cooper 1996: 14), and it is suspicious of identity politics which enforces gay hegemony through narrations of its supposed coherency and autonomy (Walters 2005: 8).<sup>40</sup> By questioning the mostly dichotomous sexual definitions proscribed by normative society, and thereby laying bare the workings of heteronormativity, queer politics aims to create spaces of expression for marginal sexualities (Van Zyl 2005a: 23). In effect, queer is not only the critical breakdown of the homo/heterosexual classification, but encompasses a wider range of transgressions as it

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<sup>39</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> century is marked by the emergence of a variety of scientific discourses that attempt to draw a parallel between corporeal attributes and homosexuality, thus disseminating the notion that sexual identities can be rationalised biologically (Terry 1995; Lance & Tanesini 2005). Scientific discourses are and have been used to explain homosexuality as rooted in the body – in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries medical and scientific research on homosexual bodies were used to justify the 'moral inferiority' and 'biological deficiency' of lgbt people, and to support claims that the latter were "unfinished" specimens of stunted evolutionary growth" (Terry 1995: 131, 135). The scientific validation of a relationship between sexuality and anatomy was questioned by Alfred Kinsey in his 1948 publication of *Sexual Behaviour of the Human Male*. In this work he explained homosexuality as a complex phenomenon, and in effect undermined the notion of a distinct homosexual body by presenting homosexuality within a full range of sexual variation, little of which is explicitly linked to the body. In spite of this, it is interesting that the homosexual body has been mobilised by a new wave of 'gay positive' biologists who advocate gay-rights by arguing that sexual orientation is biological. Since "biology is presumed to be the strongest grounds for making equal protection claims under law...gay and lesbian scientists...defend their research by stating that scientific data can be used to argue that those who have homosexual desires should be tolerated because they are 'hardwired' to do so" (Terry 1995: 161). This notion often stands in direct opposition to a social constructivist (and queer) view of the homosexual body which counters claims of 'natural', biologically determined corporeality.

<sup>40</sup> Popular accounts of queer are known to emphasise their confrontational relation to gay identity: "The one thing on which everybody was agreed was that whatever else it may or may not be, queer is definitely not gay" (Mitchell & Olafimihan 1992: 38). Gay identity is criticised by queer activists for favouring unity at the cost of difference; thereby perpetuating binarisms and dichotomous formations (Walters 2005: 8-9). For other theorists, the distinction between queer and gay identity is in itself a binary opposition that oversimplifies the major complexities of both these formations (O'Driscoll 1996: 30). It is however clear that queer theory purposely challenges gay articulations of 'authentic' sexuality by presenting the *disorganisation* of sexual categories. This is a position that I deal with later in this chapter in my discussion of the performative aspects of identity.

also “has to be understood as the result, in the domain of sexuality, of the (post)modern encounter with – and rejection of – Enlightenment views concerning the role of the conceptual, normative, progressive, liberatory, revolutionary...in social change” (Morton 1995: 370).

Representing a liminal position from which centralised power can be confronted, queer subverts normative order by mobilising the status of the ‘marginalised’ to confront the essential, the dominant, and the fundamental. However, the liminal space that queer occupies is one of the main criticisms lodged against its “fetish of the margins” as queer is held liable by theorists, such as Suzanna Walters, for dispersing “the locatable body of the lesbian or the gay man” by situating power in the “more amorphous site of the ‘queer body’ (which may or may not be gay)” (2005: 9). Queer is further criticised for perpetuating a postmodern obsession with “inconsistency, contradictions, and the ever-present ‘difference’”; letting queer subjects off the identity hook while “cashing in on the trendiness of postmodernism” (Walters 2005: 9). This critique of queer appears partly to be born out of a fear of the dissolution of gay specificity and the gay body (which is dealt with in Chapter 4.1); of ‘the gay’ losing the distinguishable characteristics that renders him/her identifiable.<sup>41</sup>

‘Queer’ is the most nuanced term that is currently in circulation that I can use to steer my way through the complex and often disjointed scene that is South African sexual expression. For this reason, the discursive application of this term is of the utmost importance for my thesis. Queer theories of sexuality and autonomy are investigated in the following sections where the discursive and spatial dimension of identity is scrutinised. Queer’s complicated relation to ‘autonomous’ sexual identity is tested; as it is displayed, performed and visually narrated through the global and local discourses of carnival. Accusations of queer purposefully ‘dissolving’ identity is addressed, as well as the adequacy of the notion of ‘identity’ for describing or categorising the ‘self’.

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<sup>41</sup> The protection of these categories originate from a concern of gay being seen as transitory (and therefore ‘a phase’), and terms such as ‘gay’ is specifically mobilised as a form of unification and activism against sexual discrimination. Letting go of these forms of classification calls to mind for many gay men and women a slip back into a time when homosexuals lived in a state of fearful oppression – an issue I discuss later in this chapter when I investigate certain narratives of liberalisation that circulate amongst the local and global ‘gay community’.

## CHAPTER 3.3: THE PERFORMANCE OF GAY/QUEER IDENTITIES

### CHAPTER 3.3.1: BAKHTIN, CARNIVALESQUE LANGUAGE AND THE DIALOGIC PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY

For Bakhtin, the establishment of identity and the conception of 'self' are intricately tied to carnivalesque discourses and narrations that are spontaneously produced within society at large. These narrations of 'self' are found in carnivalesque language structures that destabilise the authority and privileges of official ideologies. According to Bakhtin, carnival is characterised by a struggle between official and unofficial languages. Yet, carnival's relationship with normative structures is emphasised by Bakhtin as complex in character, and not merely reducible to binarisms. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin suggests that carnivalesque language can actually transgress binary dualisms imbedded in the social discourses that shape notions of identity.

Bakhtin's position on carnivalesque establishments of identity underscores ambivalent processes of communication that are discursively brought into play. According to Bakhtin, "in the world of carnival...established authority and truth are relative" and the "hard, official dividing lines between objects, phenomena, and values begin to fade. There is an awakening of the... ambivalence of all words and expressions" (1968: 256, 420). Bakhtin ascribes the relativity and ambivalence of (carnivalesque) language to textual and particularly verbal discourses whose meanings are established and performed in dialogic relationships.

Bakhtin studied language not so much as an objective, singular system, but in terms of how meaning is discursively sustained between the various users of language. Meaning, according to Bakhtin, cannot be fixed and neither can one user or institution be entirely in charge of meaning as it arises from negotiatory processes (dialogues) between users:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when...the speaker appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic expressive intention. Prior to this...the word does not exist in a neutral or impersonal language...rather it exists in other people's mouths, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own (1981: 293-294).



In Bakhtin's view, certain discourses assume positions of authority by being presented as fixed in their meaning; thus the authoritative text "demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we cannot encounter it without its authority fused to it" (1981: 342). Certain discourses (such as religious dogma or scientific theory) are indissolubly fused with authority and with the institutions or individuals who come to represent it, which severely limits the transgression of their discursively established meanings. Authoritative discourses are for the most part regarded as finished, hierarchically superior products that resist interpretation and demand unconditional acceptance. Nonetheless, even though authoritative discourses present themselves (or are represented) as univocal, Bakhtin is of the opinion that no discourses, languages or words have a centre nor do they originate from a singular site of knowledge as they are in actual fact constituted through social and linguistic interaction:

...no living word relates to an object in a singular way: between the word and its object, between the word and the speaking subject, there exists an elastic environment of other, alien words about the same object, the same theme...As such, there are no 'neutral' words and forms...; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms...each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life (Bakhtin 1981: 276, 293).

As maintained by Bakhtin, meaning is established relatively and constituted of different forms of dialogue. Discourses are created and upheld dialogically, through linguistic interaction between different users, be it individuals or institutions. Therefore, "discourse is not *finite*, it is *open*; in each of the new contexts that dialogise it, this discourse is able to reveal ever new ways to mean" (Bakhtin 1981: 345-346). Through the notion of 'dialogism', Bakhtin presents meaning as relative insofar as different bodies (ranging from physical to political or ideological) create, enforce or exchange meaning through dialogue (Holquist 1990: 20).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Bakhtin's concept of 'dialogism', of texts and discourses always referencing and assuming another's words, was also of great importance to Julia Kristeva's own formulation of 'intertextuality' (1986). Bakhtin (in his recognition of multiple dialogues that exist among various texts, genres and voices) is commended by Kristeva for incorporating a dynamic structure "in his conception of the 'literary word' as an intersection of textual *surfaces* rather than a *point* (a fixed meaning), as dialogue among several writings: that of the writer, the addressee and the contemporary or earlier context (1986: 35). Kristeva draws upon Bakhtinian dialogic theory by regarding all

Dialogues, be they textual or verbal, comprise of multiple values, references or meanings that are related between people and/or institutions. Meaning is also heteroglot as multiple knowledges can coexist without necessarily being reconcilable as their significance is established in the countless dialogues that occur between different users. Even though certain authoritative discourses may pose as unitary sites of knowledge, the multiple meaning(s) and knowledge(s) that are dialogically produced are proffered by Bakhtin as sites of transgression that emphasise simultaneity and resist dialectic interpretations.

Bakhtin is very suspicious of Hegelian dialectic frameworks that rest on notions of progressive development in which contradiction plays the central role.<sup>43</sup> He particularly avoids reducing the dialogic establishment of meaning to a dialectic relationship between a 'self' and an 'other' that results in their (Hegelian) sublation through a unifying and universal knowledge (Holquist 1990: 18). Language and dialogue are rather emphasised by Bakhtin as media through which the difference between a 'self' and an 'other' is negotiated – in this regard language serves as the “relations between two coordinates...each serving to differentiate the other” (Karcevskij 1982: 50). Bakhtin ascribes the perception of a 'self' and an 'other' to dialogue through which apparent differences between them are mobilised to negotiate their identities (Holquist 1990: 27-29). The 'self' is unfinished as it is a dialogic phenomenon that can be constituted in divergent enactments. As Bakhtin states: “we have no alibi in being” (1993: 49), and as the 'self' is constantly (re)constructed through dialogic processes, it cannot

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discourses as intertextual as they always incorporate and transform other voices, texts and discourses in their own formulation.

<sup>43</sup> A dialectic process is noted for merging points and counterpoints (thesis and antithesis) into a state of agreement (synthesis) (Dictionary of Critical Theory 2000. Sv 'dialectic'). Meanwhile, a dialogic process, which is upheld by Bakhtin, emphasises various meanings that are relative in their interaction and contingent upon specific histories. Bakhtin is of the contention that different ideologies/meanings do not necessarily merge into 'better' ones, but are modified through interaction and various forms of dialogue. In this regard, Bakhtin's formulation of dialogic discourse denotes a significant shift from the structuralist linguistics of Saussure in which language is treated as a binary and dialectic structure divided between the realms of speech (or *parole*; the individual acts of speech) and language (or *langue*; the abstract system of language that is governed by laws and norms) (Holquist 1990: 45-46). For Bakhtin, language is noted for its interactivity as multiple meanings are created simultaneously – a characteristic that defies the *parole* and *langue* dualism created by Saussure (Holquist 1990: 45, 60). Text and language is emphasised by Bakhtin as continually dynamic processes during which a singular meaning is not necessarily created through the synthesis of opposing linguistic formations, but multiple *meanings* are rather established in the dialogic practice. Bakhtin thus formulates dialogue outside a Hegelian and Saussurian framework by not implicating the user of language in materialism/idealism and language/speech binarisms (Pechy 2007: 18). The user is rather presented by Bakhtin as playing but one part in the linguistic establishment of various, simultaneous meanings.

be a finished, stable product. Instead of being a refined accomplishment, the 'self' is a heteroglot process of enactments and utterances that occur through dialogue.<sup>44</sup> The 'self' can therefore only be "discovered and defined in [the] process of interaction" (Bakhtin & Medvedev 1985: 28). Dialogue, through which meanings are circulated and established, is emphasised by Bakhtin as a 'performed act' that is contingent upon particular historical contexts (1993: 2). Various meanings are thus constituted through dialogues that are simultaneously performed in different environments.

This is also true of carnival, an event Bakhtin associates with collectives, where various voices and utterances are circulated and negotiated in constructions of 'self'. Regular norms and customs are suspended during carnival, thus spontaneous dialogue is made possible between participants. Dialogue is presented by Bakhtin as essential for the constitution and renewal of social and cultural identities – elements of relativity and becoming are emphasised during carnival through various *performances*, be it through language, laughter, clothing or general enactments of parody and gaiety (Bakhtin 1968: 80-82). This dialogic performance of identity is described by Bakhtin as a complex process through which meaning circulates, rather than being 'owned' by a singular person or institution. This relative process of constructing meaning may seem to constitute a form of autonomy, as the 'self' has the power to choose which narrative will be performed in relation to an 'other'. Yet Bakhtin warns that cultural values or authoritative discourses (such as published knowledge, moral laws, aesthetic judgements, etc.) can severely limit the utterances that are made in dialogues. Through the normative restrictions of authoritative discourses:

Any living consciousness finds cultural values already on hand and given to it, and its whole self-activity amounts to acknowledging their validity for itself. Having acknowledged once the value of scientific truth...I am henceforth subjected to its immanent law: the one who says *a* must also say *b* and *c*, and

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<sup>44</sup> 'Utterance' is Bakhtin's term for the basic components of communication (ranging from letters and sounds to novels and speeches) which comprise of a heteroglossia (or diversity) of languages drawn from various genres (social, cultural, political, official, unofficial, etc.). These utterances occur within a specific historical/contextual moment; that is the contingent dialogue into which every writer or speaker enters (Holquist & Clark 1984: 14). Bakhtin is thus of the contention that "at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth" (1981: 291).

thus all the way to the end of the alphabet. The one who said *one*, must say *two*:  
he is drawn by the immanent necessity of a series (Bakhtin 1993: 35).

In the site of carnival, dialogue is invested with the anti-authoritarian properties of parody and multivocality – Bakhtin recognises multiple voices of dissent in the vocal and visual performances of carnival's participants. But the 'self' is simultaneously denied and granted agency through various discursive practices and performances. Carnavalesque language is treated by Bakhtin as a site of agency where the participants of carnival can invert centralised systems of power, yet the overwhelming presence of authoritative discourses severely restricts the free establishment and circulation of meaning by an active 'self'.

Bakhtin's writing is sometimes riddled with ambivalence as he simultaneously grants and denies the agency of the performer. In this regard, Bakhtin differs significantly from other theorists, such as Richard Kearney (2003), Lindemann Nelson (2001), Donald Polkinghorne (1988) and Charles Taylor (1992), who support a dialogic or narrative view of the 'self'. Polkinghorne's explanation of the narrative achievement of identity and agency summarises these theorists' view that the 'self' can be actively constructed through various dialogues: "We achieve our personal identities and self concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story" (1988: 150). Retrospectively, Bakhtin appears to be supportive of such a view when he declares that: "the moment constituted by the performance of thoughts, feelings, words, practical deeds is an actively answerable attitude that I myself assume – an emotional volitional attitude toward a state of affairs in its entirety, in the context of actual unitary and once-occurrent life" (1993: 37). However, Bakhtin also contends that "at one time man actually established all cultural values and now is bound by them" (1993: 35), thus rendering humanity 'slaves' to authoritative discourses as humans lack the agency to contest them.

Bakhtin's formulation of a dialogic 'self' is therefore undecided about the agency of the performer. In the following section, I continue my exploration of the performative aspects of identity by drawing on contemporary, post-structuralist views which question notions of a self determining agent that has free access to use and manipulate discourse.

### CHAPTER 3.3.2: QUESTIONS OF AGENCY AND THE QUEER PERFORMANCE OF IDENTITY

The performative nature of queer identity can be regarded as a site of investigation for determining the agency and autonomy of the carnivalesque 'self'. As proposed by Bakhtin, carnival is generally perceived as a form of spectacle, as a platform on which to stage and narrate carnivalesque identity. Since my exploration of the agency that carnival grants its participants is largely based on the performative aspects of identity, Judith Butler's theory of performativity, as formulated in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), as well as its implications for human agency is crucial to my discussion. In order to establish the agency of the gay/queer subject, I will also draw on the work of Michel Foucault, in particular his *History of Sexuality* (1970), in which he places particular emphasis on the decisive role that discourses and society play in the configuration of sexual identities. In this section I wish to determine the degree to which the queer subject is granted agency in narrations and performances of identity. My own investigation of carnivalesque identity is based on the performance (as well as the performativity) of gender and sexual identities as they are presented during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

Butler problematises the notion of a human subject who has agency (which she refers to as the "humanist subject") by distinguishing between performance and performativity – the former being a voluntary, singular act of agency or of 'being', while the latter denotes an ongoing, repetitive process of 'becoming' (Van der Watt 2004: 3). Butler argues that human subjectivity should not merely be understood as something that 'is', neither should identity be seen as a voluntarily constructed or performed impression of 'self', but the performative nature of identity renders it a compulsory, reiterative and ritualised process. Butler's theory of performativity and her critique of human agency (which draws on elements from J.L. Austin's speech act theory where the term 'performativity' was first theorised) are based on the social establishment and discursive constitution of gender and sexuality. Butler focuses on gender and sexual identities as processes of 'becoming', rather than established modes of 'being'.

Butler explains that "performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act', but rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names" (1993: 2). Performativity is distinguished from performance in the sense that the latter implies an act of agency, while the former acknowledges that any sense of agency is always constituted by discursive powers that precede and surround it (Van der Watt 2004: 3).

This distinction between performance and performativity is made by Butler “insofar as the latter [performativity] consists of a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’” (1993: 234). Performativity can thus be perceived as the power of discourse and social norms to produce identity through processes of reiteration:

[W]here there is an ‘I’ who utters or speaks and thereby produces an effect in discourse, there is first a discourse which precedes and enables that ‘I’ and forms in language the constraining trajectory of its will. Thus there is no ‘I’ who stands *behind* discourse and executes its volition or will *through* discourse. On the contrary, the ‘I’ only comes into being through being called, named, interpellated...and this discursive constitution takes place prior to the ‘I’ (Butler 1993: 225).

In Butlerian terms, the human subject appears to be stripped of any agency since it is a discursive construct rather than a ‘natural’ product.<sup>45</sup> Yet, Butler argues that performativity can be seen as a process through which systems of power can be challenged – specifically by those who are excluded from normative formations of power and restricted to a “domain of object beings”; a site used to define the limits of dominant, heteronormative systems of power (Van der Watt 2004: 5). Through performativity those regarded as ‘object’ can attempt to reverse and displace the discursive systems through which they are simultaneously brought into subjecthood and restricted to a domain of objectness.

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<sup>45</sup> Butler has been criticised for the lack of agency and the instability that she ascribes to gay/queer identity. For instance, Adam Green feels that Butler’s description of the queer subject is too abstract to be of actual value within an individual’s physical and social environment: “Indeed, even as an individual gay man may apprehend the epistemological limitations of sexological classifications and their central historical role as a disciplining apparatus, it will do him no good to cite Butler when confronted with a pack of gay bashers...and protest that his identity is multiple and unstable, thus exempting him from the ensuing beating (Green 2002: 530). Green’s argument is insightful for its illumination of the reservations amongst critics about queer’s ambivalence and instability, and it also echoes general critiques of Butler’s theory of performativity as too abstract to be translated into actual embodiments of individuality. Yet, Green’s argument is also flawed for its presumption that a gay identity would be the logical safeguard against oppression. Citing Butler may not pacify a “pack of gay bashers”, but neither would citing the supposed stability and singularity of a gay identity. To my mind, this example indicates how narrations of identity theories are not always transferable to physical enactments of identity – a dilemma that I pay attention to in my later investigation of the *visual embodiment* of identity during carnival where I determine the extent to which the sexual vocabularies of gay and queer can be effectively translated into visual performances.

The discursive establishment of the domain of homosexual abjectness is traced by Michel Foucault in his *History of Sexuality* (1980)<sup>46</sup> to the Western construction and categorisation of the homosexual as the 'deviant' opposition to the heterosexual. According to Foucault, the homosexual may be socially constructed as the marginal and 'abject' outcast of normative society, yet this category is integral to the definition of the 'centre' or the 'order' (the heterosexual) from which it is rejected. Foucault suggests that sexuality and the accompanying notions of 'deviance' and 'perversion' are invented through systems of power, and he emphasises the decisive role of discourses in the configuration of sexual identities. Yet, even though homosexuality (as any other sexual inclination) can be seen as 'produced' (which could denote a sense of agency) this power is proffered by Foucault as unlocatable and somewhat unmanageable (Dollimore 1997: 224). Foucault is of the opinion that an opposition between power and resistance, between the 'centre' and the 'abject' or the heterosexual and the homosexual, must be seen as a "complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposite strategy" (1980a: 101). Foucault places particular emphasis on the complex and interrelated workings of power and resistance:

There are no relations of power without resistances; the latter are all the more real and effective because they are formed right at the point where relations of power are exercised; resistance to power does not have to come from elsewhere to be real, nor is it inexorably frustrated through being the compatriot of power (1980b: 142).

The category of the homosexual 'deviant' which has been produced by Western discourse, once again demonstrates the complicated workings of structures of identity. With discourses of power and reverse discourses of dissent closely imbricated, as argued by Foucault, and their

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<sup>46</sup> In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault offers a comprehensive account of the genealogy of particular sexual discourses (such as homosexuality) which contradicted the more common narrative of Victorian sexual prudishness which gave way (towards the 20<sup>th</sup> century) to 'liberated' expressions of sexuality. Foucault argues that sexuality was not so much a natural quality (i.e. biologically established) as a constructed identity situated in certain historical contexts. The homosexual is regarded by Foucault as a constructed category of identification that has been determined by Western institutions and discourses. The development of the homosexual in Western discourse can accordingly be seen in the transition from the 16<sup>th</sup> century conception of the 'sinful sodomite' to the 20<sup>th</sup> century notion of biologically produced homosexual individuals: "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (Foucault 1984: 43). This historical formulation of homosexual identity had a great impact on later queer studies which emphasise sexuality as a constructed, fluctuating category (Spargo 1999: 17).

complex relationship not allowing the one to completely 'resist' or 'eliminate' the other, the products of this relationship of power are situated in a discursive framework of interdependent structures and interrelated references. The manifestations of these relationships of power are referential and cannot always be clearly identified – power and its opposition refer to each other in the multiple discourses that they produce or that they are forced to produce. Be it power/normative order, or its resistance – the elements that form part of their relationship are inextricably linked to one other.

If the discourses that repeatedly shape order and its resistances are interrelated, and notions of 'deviance' and 'normality' are produced through referential interaction, this also applies to carnival where various resistances draw on the power that they oppose for definition, and vice versa. Identities that are constructed within the locus of normative order as well those that seemingly offer resistance are contingent on another. This is evident in the mobilisation of certain carnivalesque identities where 'queer' not only feeds off 'straight', but the opposite is also true.

The challenge and reversal of dominant systems of power through performativity by those who are deemed abject, can thus be facilitated by the process of carnival, which can be regarded as a mechanism used by participants during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* to draw attention to their own marginalisation. However, whether these participants can actively disrupt the normative order and social stability of Cape Town city space is questionable; even more so the idea that an autonomous identity of dissent can be established to counter oppression and hegemony. I recognise, however, that carnival is a playful force that challenges power formations. Within a certain discursive framework and governed by hegemonic processes, carnival may appear to establish autonomous gay/queer identities, yet the process of carnival is more an act of appropriation – a play and replay of divergent identity and spatial formations. Since carnival is situated within certain discursive frameworks, it is contingent upon the very structures that it opposes. So too are the identities that are played out – they are renegotiations of other identities and, within the hybrid structure of carnival, can be read as interdependent, creolised formations, instead of being dealt with as either wholly independent or dependant structures.

In the following sections, I investigate the extent to which sexual and carnivalesque identities draw upon pre-existing discursive frameworks for their visual constitution and (re)negotiation. I



launch this enquiry into identity's visual and spatial establishment by looking at different global and local histories that have shaped contemporary expressions of gay/queer identity during carnival (Chapter 3.4.1). From this investigation, I draw on certain 'typically' gay and straight narratives that can be queered through exposing their interrelatedness (Chapter 3.4.2). Rather than dealing with sexual expressions as isolated, I demonstrate that sexual identity is governed by processes through which exchanges of difference are mediated. Yet, the carnivalesque negotiation and reemployment of identity attributes are not necessarily a voluntary or a democratic process as the vocabularies that are used to construct meaning or to demonstrate dissent are those inherited from normative order. As dialogic relationships are largely governed by hegemonic processes that limit the range of queer expressions that are visualised during carnival, narrations of dissent and transgression are discursively limited by the dominant vocabularies that they enunciate (Chapter 3.4.3). These issues are explored in the following sections to serve as a basis for later enquiries (Chapter 4) into the imbrication of queer and space within the domain of carnival.

## **CHAPTER 3.4: BEING GAY OR PLAYING QUEER: THE VISUAL RENDITION OF IDENTITY POLITICS**

### **CHAPTER 3.4.1: LOCAL AND GLOBAL NARRATIONS OF GAYNESS AND QUEERNESS**

In order to understand the shaping of contemporary subjectivities in carnival, it is essential to investigate certain global and local events that have influenced and defined the identities of its participants. One such global event that arguably played a definitive role in the construction of South African lgbt identities, is the New York *Stonewall Riots* of 1969 – an event which marked the launch of the gay-rights movements in America and is still regarded as playing a key part in gay-rights struggles on an international level (De Waal & Manion 2006: 9). Martin Manalansan notes that a globalised view of the *Stonewall Riots* as a groundbreaking moment for gay political movements has been prevalent for the past two decades, and that it is taken for granted that the effect of this event and its significance for gay culture and politics have spread around the globe (2003: 208). The global symbolism of the *Stonewall Riots* and “the configurations of *Stonewall* as a moment of universal gay and lesbian liberation and as a construction of ‘liberation’ itself” are questioned by Manalansan, who regards it as extremely problematic to take for granted the legitimacy of *Stonewall* as the origin of international gay resistance. In this manner, Eurocentric universalisms are globally

circulated as 'authentic' narrations of liberation that have significant bearing on gay phenomena around the world (2003: 208-209).<sup>47</sup>

These 'Eurocentric universalisms' also influence South African conceptions of gayness and liberation. *Pride Parades*, which have been hosted in Johannesburg from 1990 and Cape Town from 1993, are events that have to some extent been influenced by or structured around Eurocentric narrations of gayness. *Stonewall* inspired accounts of liberation are quite often seen as platforms on which certain images of gay identity are visually presented to a public gaze. As a result, *Pride Parades* are frequently regarded as vehicles that can visualise an 'enlightened' gay identity. With visibility considered essential for raising gay consciousness during parades and carnivals, the visual images that encode gay identity are carefully selected as "sites of struggle" that can be mobilised for both celebration and protest (De Waal & Manion 2006: 9). The visibility of the 'gay community' is often proffered as a 'universal' prerogative of gay marches and parades.

In the same vein, a universal evolution of gay culture since the *Stonewall Riots* is proposed and rapidly consumed by certain theorists and gay activists alike who advocate group consciousness – 'the 1970's' are frequently used to account for the transformation of "gay culture from isolation and fragmentation into relative cohesiveness" (Cruikshank 1992: 119). In particular Americanised accounts of sexual freedom and liberation present time-frames (such as 'the 1970's') as global events that marked the growth and establishment of 'gay communities'. Accordingly, it is assumed that these 'communities' are the principal participants of *Pride Parades* who employ globalised accounts of gayness to celebrate their liberation during carnival.

It is, however, true that many subcultures have an international following as processes of globalisation allow for the circulation of various identity formations. This is especially

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<sup>47</sup> Manalansan is very critical of the privileging of Western definitions of same-sex practices and Eurocentric universalist definitions of 'gayness' through which non-Western practices are marginalised and regarded as 'unliberated' (2003: 209). Notions of 'gay' as a liberated category have been lifted out of the context of *Stonewall* as a Western narrative that holds certain 'universal truths' with regards to liberation. Problematically, "the discourse about *Stonewall* has changed from localised descriptions of a series of police raids in a downtown Manhattan gay bar in 1969 into a revolutionary moment that originates liberation for gays and lesbians everywhere" (Manalansan 2003: 210).

applicable to gay subcultures, which is rising as universal phenomena.<sup>48</sup> Gay subcultures often draw on certain 'universal' narratives which provide a Western "way of thinking...a set of ideas about politics, high culture, pop culture, society, religion, manners, fashion...and sex" (Bauer 1993: 4). In the South African context, gay subcultures galvanised support to fight heteronormative oppression by drawing on the Western (and predominantly American) rhetoric of gay visibility and liberalisation, especially during apartheid (Croucher 2002: 317). This raises the question: how local or how global are South African gay/queer movements, and how uniform are general movements across national boundaries? Given the dominance of the West in the definition and the development of the category 'gay', the 'universal history' of gayness undoubtedly provides a strong point of departure for identity constructions. For those in the know, events such as *Stonewall* are regarded as 'universal' watershed events in 'gay history'.

But the value of this history is also limited, as local events can be more decisive. The notion of a 'singular', 'universal' 'community' may be one of the most dominant forces underlying gay group identities, yet it is not the only one. For example, *The Cape Town Pride Parade* is made up out of a diverse congregation of participants, and is situated within a very specific local context. It is highly dependant on the physical and ideological sphere of South Africa for definition, whether it yields to the discursive and spatial structures of this city, or resists it. This dependence on a local history is clearly signified by the participants in Figure 1, who are drawing on the distinct creole culture of Cape Town by mobilising visual elements from the *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival*.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Susan Willis (1993) argues in this regard that subcultural expressions are rooted in specific historical and social formations, yet certain subcultural codes and histories are globally employed. Willis underscores the significance of global communication networks in the transference of certain histories and codes from one place and time to another (1993: 366). Certain codes and narratives are embedded in what Willis calls a 'cultural memory reservoir' from which subcultures draw visual material and discursive practices (1993: 366-367).

<sup>49</sup> The origins of the *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival* are attributed to the New Year festivals in Cape Town which had their roots in the musical activities of slaves. Slaves were often given a holiday at the New Year and, especially after their emancipation, their freedom was celebrated during this day by parades and musical events through the streets of Cape Town. Prior to their emancipation, the holiday and New Year celebrations of Cape Town's slaves coincided, and this time became known as an "occasion for building and strengthening social links within a community of people coming from various cultural backgrounds and assembled together because they shared the same condition" (Martin 2000: 371). After they were set free, the anniversary of the slaves' emancipation and New Year celebrations were fused together and became an event through which social links between former slaves could be shaped. These musical events developed into creole repertoires, in which different local and European elements were mixed and fused together. A creole culture developed in Cape



**Figure 1.**

Unknown Photographer, *Cape Town Pride – February 2006* (2006).

Digital Photograph. (Gapleisure 2006)

Visual signifiers that 'belong' to the locally produced *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival*, ranging from the distinct clothes<sup>50</sup> to the musical instruments<sup>51</sup> that are used, are transferred to another carnival. The *Cape Town Pride Parade* is thus imbued with distinctly local narrations of identity as it renegotiates the imagery and rituals that are displayed in the *Cape Town Minstrel*

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Town through contact with various traditions, people and social organisations, ranging from local festival practices, to the influence of *American Blackface Minstrelsy* (Martin 2000: 368).

<sup>50</sup> The minstrel costume can be recognised by the distinct use of multi-coloured suits that are made from 'satin' (which in contemporary Cape Town vernacular refers to shiny, synthetic fabric), a decorated hat, and umbrellas which are all part of the 'gear' of Minstrel troupes (Martin 1999: 9). Make-up is also applied, ranging from traditional minstrel patterns, to the use of glitter and bright colours (Martin 1999: 9). It is interesting to note that sunglasses have become an important part of the face decorations of the contemporary Minstrels, fulfilling not only a practical task, but also becoming part of their aesthetics. All of these elements are utilised to create visual coherency amongst members of a troupe. Certain visual elements, whether of historical significance or of contemporary value, are thus used in an eclectic mix, and play an integral part of the aesthetics of the *Cape Town Minstrels*.

<sup>51</sup> Musical instruments and songs play an important part in contemporary carnival activities, and serve as a reminder of the roots of the *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival* which originated in the musical activities of slaves. The songs that are used in this carnival are predominantly a fusion between songs and musical repertoires from African, European and Eastern origins. Religious Muslim songs and music (which had their roots in India and the East Indies) as well as elements from Koranic recitations were integrated with European musical repertoires, such as English glees, *nederlandsliedjies* (Dutch songs) and original creole songs, such as the *ghoemalielijies*, which originated in the Cape during the era of slavery (Martin 2000: 371). Afrikaans *liedjies* and *moppies* were also added in the 1940's when the Minstrels were put under pressure by the nationalist government to include Afrikaans songs in their repertoire, and thus add a bit of 'Afrikaans culture' to the carnival (Martin 2000: 370-371).

*Carnival* (which have in turn appropriated other local and global histories). The *Cape Town Pride Parade* thus replays other carnivals and represents their histories within its own domain.

This dialogue between different carnivals is negotiated by the participants that share a marginalised status. Both gay/queer and 'coloured' subcultures have been discriminated against during apartheid, and both have employed carnival to show their opposition to hegemonic institutions.<sup>52</sup> By drawing on another carnival and its signifiers, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is acknowledging other, local histories that have shaped the production of identity in Cape Town. The *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival* has a rich history of appropriation that shaped its contemporary formation as a creole cultural expression.<sup>53</sup> By drawing on this rich history, various narratives that originated or were appropriated within the Cape Town context are brought to the fore during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. In this manner, this carnival's own creole nature is emphasised as it is not only an event shaped by 'global' repertoires of

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<sup>52</sup> This carnivalesque act is an important validation of identity when considering the marginal status that has been historically ascribed to both these groups as they were controlled and repressed by especially the apartheid regime in South Africa. The participants of the *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival* consist mostly of the 'coloured' peoples of Cape Town who were forced to conform to segregation and other apartheid laws, such as various *Group Areas Acts*. The participation of their involvement in the *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival* was also restricted, and from 1977 to 1989 all *Minstrel Parades* were forbidden in Cape Town under the *Riotous Assembly Act* (Martin, 2000: 376-377). During Nationalist rule, carnival served as a site of opposition for 'coloured' peoples to show resistance to apartheid laws and hegemonic oppression.

<sup>53</sup> One such expression that clearly reveals the *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival's* creole nature is the character of the 'Coon' which was appropriated from *American Blackface Minstrelsy*. This character, as it was performed in America, is essentially racist as most of the early American minstrel troupes were composed of white comedians, singers and musicians who mocked African-American slaves in their performances which drew on certain demeaning 'black characteristics'. These minstrel shows, known for exploiting black stereotypes, evinced the biases held by white Americans against African-American slaves and revealed the white population's fascination with the 'abject' or 'exotic' nature of blacks (Martin 1999: 78). Considering the culturally hybrid nature of 'coloured' identity, the appropriation of elements from American blackface minstrelsy (however racist the latter may be) did provide a site for the expression of ambivalence as "minstrel shows were a forum where bits of cultures, black and white, American, European and African, were circulated, exchanged and fused" (Martin 1999: 79). Even though these minstrel shows perpetuated racial stereotypes, their popularity within the South African context can to some extent be ascribed to their mixed, anti-authoritarian nature and the complex cultural hybridity they represented (Martin 1999: 79). This is evident in the simultaneous recognition of the historical context and racist nature of blackface minstrelsy, and the renegotiation of these influences within the South African context. Forms of parody and mockery were initially used by white minstrel performers in their comedic (and inherently racist) impersonations of black slaves. Yet, through an act of double parody, the minstrel performances by the 'coloured' peoples of South Africa are based not only on their own historical context of a troubled, racialised past; but also comments on other histories and previous acts of parodying. The *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival* thus represents not so much a single act of historical appropriation, but rather a complex system of previous appropriations and parodies.

'gayness', but also by local histories. The narratives of liberation that are performed during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* are thus not exclusively drawn from Western sources, but form part of local performances of resistance (such as the *Cape Town Minstrel Carnival*) that have shaped the history of South Africa at large, as well as Cape Town's carnivals.

#### **CHAPTER 3.4.2: QUEERING GAY AND STRAIGHT**

The narrative of a 'liberated', 'singular' and 'universal' 'gay community' is not only problematic for its denial of multiple histories that all have bearing on local identity expressions, but also for the polarisation of sexual identities that it inevitably perpetuates. With gay often posed as an identity freed from the restraints of straight domination, the binarist construction of these identities can actually reinscribe systems of sexual hierarchy (Floyd 1998: 182-183). Even though gay is often read as a 'progressive' category, purportedly representing liberation and agency, to narrate gay solely in terms of its opposition to straight can actually have conservative repercussions. Through processes of sexual codification which are overtly concerned with polarisation, gay narrations of a sexual self can be rendered purely reactive as they repeat the hegemonic discourses of heteronormative identity.

Homonormative discourses often stereotype straight as the necessarily 'bigoted other' from which gay identity should be 'liberated' in the same way that heteronormative discourses narrate gay as the 'abject other'. The notion of gay and straight as autonomous, conflicting identity constructions is also flawed for its supposition that these identities are completely unrelated as their differences apparently far outweigh any similarities. By emphasising sexual identities (such as gay and straight) as singular units of meaning that are completely dissimilar in their make-up, divergent queer identities are severely limited in terms of expression. Rather than drawing on the rhetoric of opposing sexual identities, I wish to propose the interrelatedness of sexual expressions. Instead of dealing with sexual expressions as 'uncontaminated' examples of 'pure' sexualities, the interconnectedness of the very cultural and social structures that govern these categories should already give a clear indication as to their complex expression. The reciprocal establishment of sexual identity is accentuated by Richard Dyer who argues that "culture does not give us mediated access to an uncontaminated queerness...because queer and straight are neither exclusive nor equal categories" (2002: 10). The categories of gay, straight, and queer, their sexual expression and their deployment in cultural production are not the exclusive 'property' of the people who identify themselves as

such.<sup>54</sup> Neither is the production of such categories unmediated, for they are structured out of and in relation to each other – “just as queer traditions were bricolaged in part out of straight, so straight culture was indelibly structured by queer” (Floyd 2002: 10).

In this regard, I wish to emphasise that sexual or personal identity is governed by dynamic processes through which exchanges of difference are mediated. Identities – whether queer, gay and/or straight – are established through meaningful relationships of *both* difference and similarity. Paul Cilliers (2007) points out that, in structuralist and post-structuralist theories of language and identity, difference is regarded as a source of meaning. Identity, according to Cilliers, does not determine difference, but is a result thereof. Cilliers calls for an “economy of difference” that should be acknowledged in identity formations:

Meaningful relationships in a complex system develop through relationships of difference, not through opposition. For meaning to become possible, some form of similarity must already be there...The element of identity inaugurates the play of difference, while simultaneously protecting it from pure arbitrariness (Cilliers 2007).

The notion of ‘meaning’, whether used to indicate a personal or institutional identity, is the result of constrained differences that are brought into play with similarities. Identity is therefore not an *a priori* condition for existence or meaning, but a result of differences that are constantly negotiated – identity is thus a dynamic concept rather than a stable structure (Cilliers 2007). As the differences between identities are shaped by continuous processes of interaction between sameness and difference, and the meaning and function of the identities are constantly shifting (Cilliers 2007), difference is not the function of binary oppositions, but forms part of a network of interacting relationships of meaning.

Cillier’s formulation of the continuous play between different identities and categories is important for my own investigation of changing queer, gay and straight (and other) articulations of sexual identity, particularly as they are performed during carnival. These

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<sup>54</sup> People who identify themselves exclusively as straight may engage in sexual activities with someone of the same sex without it changing their chosen and/or presented sexual identity. The identified straight may engage in gay activities (and vice versa), or the bisexual can take on both simultaneously, or can prefer neither. Similarly, someone who identifies as gay may later prefer to employ queer as descriptive of his/her identity (or vice versa), or can use both these terms as simultaneous forms of identification.

categories overlap and challenge each other in the histories, cultural products and visual practices that they share – a tendency that can be demonstrated in the visual articulation and appropriation of various carnival practices. One such narration of identity that illustrates the simultaneous blurring and accentuation of difference is the performance of the drag queen in the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

The drag queen is often regarded as “the unacceptably freakish face of Pride, focused on by the media while ‘ordinary’ gay and lesbian people are ignored” (De Waal & Manion 2006: 9). Yet, the drag queen has played a key part in gay-rights struggles (such as the *Stonewall Riots*, for example) and, even in contemporary carnivals, this identity is still mobilised as the vanguard of *Pride Parades*. In Western culture, the use of drag in its most basic form has been regarded as the appropriation of effeminate clothing and adornment as a means to explore a homosexual identity<sup>55</sup>. However, it also entails the parodying of sexual and gender roles that can be taken to the extreme by making social and political statements, and also “freaking out” the straight community (Cole 2000: 51). Whereas the use of drag in some cases signifies an effeminate gay identity, the use of “radical drag” – in which extreme male and female stereotypes are appropriated and thereby parodied – is specifically utilised to create confusion by blurring conventional gender indicators (Cole 2000: 51-52).

In the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, both these forms of drag can be identified in the sartorial choices made by some participants – see Figures 2 and 3 in which the former is an example of an overt, effeminate style of dress, while the latter shows a more radical appropriation of both male and female items of clothing.

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<sup>55</sup> Effeminacy and effeminate sartorial choices (as exemplified by drag) have long been associated with homosexuality, and from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the effeminate image of the “fairy” or the “queen” was the only publicly recognised image of gay men (Cole 2000: 31). Shaun Cole describes this phenomenon as one in which “many gay men accepted the equation of homosexuality with effeminacy, and thus viewed feminine presentational strategies as a means of expressing their identity as gay men: hence they feminised their presentational imagery by adopting womanly mannerisms and interests” (2000: 31). The adoption of the image of the effeminate male also became a way to participate in gay/queer subcultures, and to identify as a “fairy” was for many the first step in creating a homosexual image and understanding of self (Cole 2000: 31, 34-35). Seymour Kleinberg argues in this regard that it is not only an issue of participating in gay subculture, but gay men also “imitated women because they understood that they were victims in sisterhood of the same masculine ideas about sexuality. Generations of women defined themselves entirely in men’s terms, and homosexual men often seemed to accept the same values...It was not a particularly effective means of ending oppression, but it was a covert defiance of a society that humiliated them” (1978: 8-9).





**Figure 2.**  
Craig Sydney, *Untitled* (2004).  
Digital Photograph. (Sydney 2006).



**Figure 3.**  
Craig Sydney, *Untitled* (2004).  
Digital Photograph. (Sydney 2006).

Figure 2 shows a quite literal interpretation of female identity – not only does the participant associate himself with femininity and the effeminate identity of the “queen” (or the “fairy”), but he also literally presents himself as a queen; with the dress, tiara, jewellery, flowers and motorcar becoming props with which to perform this identity. While the identity performed by the participant in Figure 2 is a visual pun in which different queenlike attributes are employed,

the participant in Figure 3 employs a more radical form of drag in which female attire (the red dress and fishnet stockings, which are related to a very sexualised and feminine form of dress) are combined with items overtly associated with masculinity (the military hat and the workmen's boots – the latter also transformed by combining the masculine boots with platform soles).<sup>56</sup> The impact of this form of dress is derived not so much from presenting these different items of clothing as separate signifiers of femaleness/maleness or gayness/straightness, but from the blurring of differences between them. The use of cross-dressing exposes the constructedness of gender and sexual binarisms by challenging their clear demarcation through the *bricolage* or appropriation of conventional styles of dress. The reorganisation of seemingly incompatible sexual and gender categories illustrates the capacity of cross-dressing to disrupt the conventional meanings ascribed to codes of dress by (hetero)normative society.

Quite understandably, the drag identities that are performed during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, are often treated by gay activists as displays of protest that have the capacity to expose deeper issues (such as discrimination and inequality) that are embedded in the social context. During carnival, the harnessing of drag may give the impression of sanctioning the autonomy of its user, while laying bare or even inverting the inequalities encoded in social order. With lgbt people often demonised as social enemies, as the 'deviant' or 'perverted' outcasts of society, the appropriation of drag is a powerful transgressive tool to create awareness of and also resistance to systems of exclusion. The performance of 'radical', 'confrontational', or 'transgressive' drag roles lends a flavour of dissent to carnival activities as participants disrupt conventional sexual and gender codes.

The carnivalesque spectacle of drag identity thus seems to constitute a form of agency for the person actively drawing on various gender and sexual signifiers. The drag performer's

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<sup>56</sup> This juxtaposition of clothes bears significant resemblance to Dick Hebdige's theories about subcultural style as a means to redefine and break conventional sartorial codes. Hebdige notes that certain individuals or cultural groups (which he refers to as "subcultural stylists") use visual ensembles to distinguish themselves from surrounding cultures. Conventional sartorial codes are appropriated, redefined or even 'abused' by "subcultural stylists" who fabricate their own codes of dress (1979: 101). By redefining conventional codes of dress, the "subcultural stylist" demonstrates his/her own 'deviance' from normative society and the orthodox outfits worn by the average man or woman. This subcultural appropriation of different commodities can also be defined as a form of *bricolage*; as the radical improvisation, subversion and adaptation of signs, structures and commodities in order to constitute new discourses, convey different messages and create new objects (Hebdige 1979: 103-104). The subcultural stylist or *bricoleur* juxtaposes seemingly incompatible signs and commodities in order to disrupt the conventional meanings that are ascribed to clothes, thereby rendering style and sartorial choices a form of revolt, protest and confrontation.

appropriation and renegotiation of certain codes of dress are frequently popularised in gay and queer discourses as indicative of his/her emancipated identity; as if drag enactments of identity will automatically guarantee the agency of the performer and his/her discursive independence from normative institutions. However, in Liese van der Watt's opinion, this supposition is actually highly problematic for, even in the case of 'radical' or 'terrorist drag' (through which the drag artist tries to shock, confront and even offend audiences), the agency and identity of the performer is still to some degree discursively constituted by power structures (2004: 3, 7). By drawing on Butler's theory of performativity, van der Watt contends that drag performers inevitably draw on heteronormative systems as sites of meaning and that the dominant hegemonic powers that the drag performers try to provoke remain the locus around which identity is performed and formulated (2004). Carnavalesque attempts to blur and renegotiate gendered and sexual roles through drag inevitably draw on heteronormative descriptions of gender and sexuality as drag's visual significance is largely related to the simultaneous employment of male and female signifiers. By making use of drag, the performer cannot escape the stronghold that these normative definitions have, neither can they be completely erased from the narration of 'self'. The use of drag during carnival therefore reveals the extent to which the subjectivity of the drag performer is interpellated by the very structures he/she are trying to transgress. To a limited extent, drag narrations of self can blur the identity categories proscribed by normative society, yet sexual and gendered binarisms cannot be banished from the vocabularies that drag/queer/gay draw upon for definition or react upon in resistance. Consequently, the 'failure' of drag performance to move beyond a normative description of sexuality and gender confirms its dependence on normative vocabularies to narrate dissent.

### **CHAPTER 3.4.3: NARRATIONS OF DEFIANCE, VOCABULARIES OF COMPLIANCE**

*[A]ll our European languages, the language of everything that has participated, from near or far, in the adventure of Western reason...nothing within this language, and no one among those who speak it, can escape the historical guilt... The unsurpassable, unique, and imperial grandeur of the order of reason...is that one cannot speak out against it except by being for it, that one can protest it only from within it; and within its domain (Derrida 1980: 35-36).<sup>57</sup>*

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<sup>57</sup> Derrida is commenting here on Foucault's *Madness and Civilisation* (1967) in which Foucault supposedly attempted "to write a history of madness *itself*...that is madness speaking on the basis of its own experience and

Narratives of opposition and transgression inevitably draw on the vocabulary of normative order as the language that is used to oppose 'reason' is implicated in the very structures it aims to contest. The paradox is that the languages and narratives (textual or visual) that are used to deconstruct (hetero)normativity, had been used in the construction of these normative practices and institutions in the first place. In the same way, the textual and visual references that are drawn upon during carnival or in society at large to oppose normative regulation, are dependant for definition upon the very hegemonic discourses that are contested. This appears to be a strategic weakness of all reactive movements since it is impossible to contest the binarisms that produce a subordinate hierarchic status without resorting to the same languages that perpetuated such binary polarisation. To deconstruct hegemonic discourses, one therefore inevitably ends up using its vocabularies. As normative discourse and its opposition are largely constituted through the same vocabulary, narrations of dissent (such as carnivalesque performances of queer identity) cannot escape the hegemonic stronghold of normative discursive practices. As Foucault argues with regards to homosexuality and its discursive constitution:

There is no question that the appearance...of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality...made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. There is not, on one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations (Foucault 1980b: 101-102).

Since heterosexual patriarchy is the dominant sexuality in most environments and the majority of interactions between people take place within heterosexual discourse (Valentine 1993:

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under its own authority" (1980: 33-34). Derrida is of the opinion that such an act is impossible since the category of 'madness' is so embedded within the archaeology of European language and historical meaning that it cannot be granted a voice of its own. Derrida argues that a disengagement from the totality of historical language is impossible as no languages can escape the 'Order' of Western reason. "If the Order of which we are speaking is so powerful...this is so precisely by virtue of the universal, structural, and infinite complicity in which it compromises all those who understand it in its own language, even when this language provides them with a form of their own denunciation. Order is then denounced within order" (Derrida 1980: 35).

241), queer narrations of sexuality inevitably draw on the repertoire of heteronormative languages. Since this also applies to carnival, it seems almost impossible for carnivalesque languages of opposition to actually transgress reason and normative institutions without duplicating its structures. It is therefore ironic, and inevitable, that the vocabulary of revolt is produced by the dominant party.

The limited vocabulary that is used during carnival can clearly be seen in evocations of a 'normal' gay male identity. This image was very important in the marches of the early gay rights movements, where the adherence to normative, masculine dress was seen as a way to get the support and acceptance of the heterosexual community (Cole 2000: 60). By yielding to notions of an 'ordinary' and 'respectable' gay identity, members of lgbt subcultures often adopted codes of dress that would read as heterosexual within normative society. This is also evident in the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, where the presentation of a 'normal' gay identity is often used to counter the overt displays of 'perversion' that are seen in other performances of identity (such as those of the drag queen). The performance of a 'normal' identity is clearly seen in Figure 4; a photograph showing a man wearing 'ordinary', everyday male clothes.



**Figure 4.**

Craig Sydney, *Untitled* (2004).

Digital Photograph. (Sydney 2006).

The attire that this participant has chosen to wear (the beige cap, grey T-shirt and dark sunglasses), renders him unobtrusive and indistinguishable from 'normal', heterosexual males. The only visual symbol that links him to lgbt subcultures and the *Pride Parade*, is the pink piece of cloth that is tied around his arm – pink being a colour that is accepted (within this context) as displaying allegiance to lgbt subcultures. The attire is chosen to 'blend in' and to emphasise the 'naturalness' of this male's identity construction, thereby confirming the normative dominance of heterosexual masculinity.

The female participant in Figure 5 also adheres to normative codes of dress – the slacks, T-shirt, sneakers and pink kerchief that she is wearing seems to border on everyday ('straight') wear. One could argue that she might just as well be strolling down the street on any day other than carnival – she is so unobtrusive and 'normal' that she could be mistaken for a spectator rather than a participant. Yet, if carnival is about transgression, the display of 'normality' (whether it is deliberately performed, 'inadvertently' chosen, or merely read as such by the viewer), could be one of the most unexpected features at a carnival mostly associated with, or stereotyped for, glittering 'drag queens' and 'butch lesbians'



**Figure 5.**

Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2007).

Digital Photograph.

Even though carnivalesque vocabularies may draw on the very languages they are critical of, it does not necessarily mean that those narrations that appear to be 'normal' or 'conformative' are not transgressive. The criticism of being 'too normal', of conforming when one should try to be anything but straight, reveals not only how certain stereotypes are reinforced in the display of carnival identity, but how subtle displays *and playings with* identity are sometimes overlooked in the frantic search for the 'most transgressive' queer expression. Steering clear of the straight may seem to be one of the prerequisites for gay carnival to triumph for a day, yet it is precisely this attitude that not only reinforces the polarisation of sexual expression and produces a form of radical alterity<sup>58</sup>, but limits the diversity of the responses to contemporary South African social, cultural, sexual (and many other) formations.

The predicament that is faced in this context is complex and double-edged – the adoption of a 'normal'/'natural' identity is dismissed as conceding to 'straightness', while the taking on of a more 'queer' identity is immediately associated with 'fakeness'. The 'diesel dyke' and the 'flapping queen' are derided for appropriating ('inappropriate') opposite-sex characteristics that were supposedly never theirs for the taking. This dilemma cannot be resolved as long as most expressions of sexual identity are judged in terms of illegitimacy and inappropriateness. Accusing the use of 'straight material' as indicative of a defeatist attitude, and as signalling a concession to heterosexual hegemony, also denies the opportunity for much needed renegotiations of sexual identities and highlights the problematic perpetuation of sexual categories for 'proper' gay conduct.

### **CHAPTER 3.5: THE CARNIVALESQUE IDENTITY CONCLUDED**

In my writing I do not aspire to indulge carnival as a totally liberating or autonomous force – as a performative structure that can constitute identity formations that would not be realisable in normative society. I do not present carnival as a finalised enactment of agency, nor do I treat its identity and spatial expressions as independent from authoritative (heteronormative)

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<sup>58</sup> Even though articulations of difference produce inclusionary and celebratory discourses for the marginalised, and proliferate in contemporary theorisations of the 'other', Susan Ruddick draws attention to the recent perpetuation of modes of radical alterity – the continuation of identity constructions "where those so positioned can neither rest comfortably in an assignation as 'other' nor be recognised as 'just like us'" (2004: 36). She presents the current radical positioning of young Muslims in the West to be one such example – those who wear traditional clothes are suspiciously viewed as part of a backward people, while their adoption of modern dress are equally suspected of being the guises of "sleeper terrorists" (2004: 36).

discourses. I rather wish to emphasise carnival as a spectacle in which discourses (be it dominant or transgressive) are performed (be it wilfully or unwillingly). Identities, whether queer, gay or straight (or any other), are established through relationships of difference and similarity. Since these identities are all established discursively, it is inevitable that they would draw upon each other for meaning, as they are the result of diversity and differences that are constantly negotiated. As the differences between identities are shaped by continuous processes of interaction, and the meaning and function of the identities are constantly shifting, they form part of a network of meaning.

As Butler proposes, there may not be an 'I' that pre-exists discourse who can actively utter and speak (or stutter) himself/herself into existence. Nonetheless, the hierarchies that are attached to the discourses that precede the 'I' are not exempted from change, and the values that are attached to similarities and differences are not absolute, but contingent upon various (historical) circumstances. While I do not propose that carnival is the only site of agency for discursive change, I would argue that carnival is a useful site of scrutiny for the visual manifestation of and discursive playing with identity. As carnival is usually regarded as one of the most transgressive spatial mobilisations of identity, carnivalesque narrations of 'self' may be useful for gauging the degree to which the discourses that shape the 'I' are open towards renegotiation.

In the following chapter I explore the *Cape Town Pride Parade's* spatial properties in terms of the contemporary theorisation of queerspace. The challenges posed by a more nuanced (queer) conception of identity formations is addressed – not so much to provide a ready solution for identity problems, but to demonstrate their complexity. I also reveal how many of the problems facing gay/queer participants of carnival that may have been pictured as unsolvable in the past, have actually either played themselves out, or have grown into new, more complex dilemmas.



## CHAPTER 4

### CARNIVAL AND GAY/QUEER CONSTRUCTIONS OF SPACE

This chapter serves as a platform on which to discuss the interrelated concepts of 'queer' and 'space' within the arena of carnival. Both the sexual and the spatial have thus far been investigated as discursively exercised and physically manifested sites of signification that simultaneously yield to and counter dominant modes of power. Even though the sexual and the spatial have been allocated different chapters (in order to investigate the multiplicity of meanings ascribed to these extensive fields), they are not separate areas of interest and therefore not treated as isolated categories. Carnival, queer and space have rather revealed themselves to be in dialogue – they play with and replay the different characteristics that they share if they are brought into the same discursive space. From an investigation of the theoretical dimensions of queerspace, I move to the queering of space as it is exemplified by the physical and ideological relationship between the private and the public realms (Chapter 4.1). I also look at the queering/disruption of categories of spectator and participant during carnival (Chapter 4.2) and queer renegotiations of so-called 'global gay space' (Chapter 4.3).

In the same way that 'queer' is a term shaped by multiplicity and ambivalence, 'queerspace' is also slippery to define. Not only does it comprise two terms that already bring with them various meanings (and theoretical baggage), but specifically the 'queer' in 'queerspace' lends it a certain elusiveness. Yet it is precisely the openness of 'queer' that invests 'space' with a critical approach towards the normative and sensitivity towards the multiple. 'Queer', a term characterised by its questioning of the hierarchic polarisation and normative regulation of sexual identity, lends 'queerspace' the same inquiring approach to spaces that are cognitively and/or physically constituted. The boundaries of space in its various forms are also blurred as "queerspace crosses, engages, and transgresses social, spiritual, and aesthetic locations" (Brent Ingram 1997: 20). Within the field of queerspace, space is treated as not only comprising corporeal and physical dimensions, or of being metaphorically, ideologically, socially and politically produced, but even of moving into previously unrecognised fields, such as media and electronic spaces. I propose a definition that takes into account not only the plethora of queerspaces already produced/designed, but even those that are *desired* to exist or those that are *forced not* to exist. Queerspace can accordingly be seen as "a seduction of the reading of space where queerness, at a few brief points and for some fleeting moments,

dominates the (heterocentric) norm, the dominant social narrative of the landscape (Brent Ingram 1997: 21). Queerspace has the potential to be anywhere in the public realm as it is constituted through a queer appropriation of space through personal interactions with it (Reed 1996: 64).

An acknowledgement of its own contingency and a contestation of normative regulations are two of the most prominent characteristics of queerspace. A queerspatial emphasis on contingency not only draws attention to the fluctuating features of sexual identity and spatial properties, but it also lays bare the complex relationship between identity issues and their spatial manifestation. This is of significant value in the contemporary context of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* where the performance of sexed selves are played out in the spatial realms provided by carnival. The contingency of queerspace opens up multiple dealings with identity and space, and recognises the “interaction between ‘self’ and ‘context’ as one that inevitably produces a state of flux... [in] the development of identities and intimate relationships in a post-apartheid South Africa” (Phillips 2005: 138).

My application of queerspace to carnival is not only referring to forms of sexual and spatial synthesis, but also to the questioning of that which is considered the norm. I therefore investigate carnival as a phenomenon that disrupts heteronormative institutions and processes that function within a city. With regards to querying and queering the normative, queerspace can be regarded as “an expanding set of queer sites that function to destabilise heteronormative relations and thus provide more opportunities for homoerotic expression and related communality” (Brent Ingram 1997: 449). Queerspace and the queerscape (the physical landscape/setting that harbours queer sites) can offer means to resist and transform formerly homophobic and heteronormative social, physical and conceptual spaces by acts of reclamation and renegotiation.

Yet, queerspace is critical not only of heteronormative spaces, but also of the normative regulation of all sexualised spaces, specifically homonormative geographies. As attitudes towards sexual identities change, so do the norms that are created or self-imposed. By merely equating sexual oppression and normative regulation with the heteronormative, with the straight, many hegemonic structures can go unnoticed. And by simply judging queerspace to be those spaces inhabited/reclaimed/frequented by the ‘gay community’ (as it is often done in global discourses, as I discuss in Chapter 4.3), much of queerspace’s queerness is squandered

for mere acquiescence – for consenting to the homo-norm. *Even then*, if carnival can be seen as a vehicle for queerness, how much is it actually transgressive of norms? On which float does carnival ride – the glittering gay one in the front, or the ‘fashionably’ unlocatable queer one? Is it both, or even none? In the following sections I determine the effectiveness of carnival in mobilising the queer in space, and its actual transgression of hetero- and homonormative order.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1: THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC: BOUNDARIES AND THE DEMARCATION OF ‘RESPECTABILITY’ AND ‘DEVIANCE’**

In this subchapter I investigate the simultaneous construction and contestation of boundaries by looking at the demarcation of separate spheres for private and public expressions of identity. The establishment of cultural and social boundaries in Western society have led to the demarcation of separate spheres for the private and public expression of (sexual) identity. Boundaries, as social constructs and symbolic devices that enforce the demarcation of space, are used to separate private and public spheres into opposing social, moral, cultural and political realms.

Zygmunt Bauman claims that the imposition of boundaries within modern societies are based on notions of Western civilisation and culture as clearly delineated bastions of human accomplishment.<sup>59</sup> Western society is implicated, according to Bauman, in processes of normative regulation, constraint, routine and order making (1999: xiii-xiv). Culture, as well as its spatial delineation, serves as a “handmaiden of social order” through which society can regulate that which is deemed ‘abnormal’ (1999: xvi). The delineation of space into different categories, which was upheld through the discourse of modernity, created a society of supposed regularity and order. Space, regarded in Western society as an object of administration, created uniformity by “homogenising the heterogeneous and unifying the differentiated”, as well as shaping human society into coherent systems of identification (1999: xxv-xxvi). Collective identities and cultural barriers were accordingly maintained by creating an inside/outside dichotomy, and by inculcating spaces of private and public life. The

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<sup>59</sup> In *Culture and Praxis* (1999), Zygmunt Bauman explores different classifications of culture by distinguishing between culture as concept, structure and praxis. For Bauman, culture in its conception and production is fixated with order making, and this is clearly evident in the establishment of boundaries between a cultural inside and outside; private and public; ‘us’ and ‘them’, etc.

separation of these spatial spheres was accomplished by emphasising their disconnectedness in order to substantiate myths of the public sphere's cohesiveness, rationality and morality.

The polarisation of these spheres came to bear significantly on notions of the 'morality' and 'civility' of modern society. The relationship between the private and public was rooted in modernist notions of Western society as the epitome of rational and democratic civic relations, with the public sphere serving as the 'moral environment' which could regulate civic discourses<sup>60</sup>. The concept of public space came to represent the institutional and material world; a space that regulated interpersonal relationships, and within which an individual could interact with others as well as with society at large (Mandanipour 2003: 233, 235). Meanwhile, the private sphere came to be defined as a personal space that is established under the control of an individual since it existed outside public observation and is protected from the external gaze of society (Mandanipour 2003: 230).<sup>61</sup> Both the public and the private are inextricably tied to conceptions of morality as their relationship to one another is determined by social, cultural and political institutions:

The public and the private as twin force fields help to create a moral environment for individuals, singly and in groups; to dictate norms of appropriate or worthy action; to establish barriers to action, particularly in

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<sup>60</sup> The notion of the public sphere as a bastion of rationality was first formulated by Jürgen Habermas in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989). Habermas presents the public sphere as the constitution of bourgeois public society that (in its ideal form) is made up of private people that are gathered as a public to articulate the needs of society. The public sphere, which is in essence tied to a modern humanist commitment to the autonomy of the individual, can be seen as a network that supposedly enables 'democratic', 'rational' communication (Johnson 2006: 1). According to Habermas, the public sphere created the ideal social conditions for rational-critical debates about social, political and cultural issues, as apposed to 'irrational', private issues (Calhoun 1996: 1-2). Habermas's formulation of the public sphere is much contested for its hierarchic implementation of the private and public spheres, and for its enunciation of hegemonic forces that dictate which discourses can be allowed into public circulation. Nancy Fraser (1990) specifically draws attention to the fact that marginalised groups are excluded from the 'universal', hegemonic public sphere as it is formulated by Habermas. Michael Warner (1992) is also of the contention that open homosexuality is often erased from the public sphere, and non-heterosexuals must remain 'closeted' in order to participate in the larger public discourses that Habermas idealised as 'democratic'.

<sup>61</sup> The private sphere, signifying the location of a 'self' and his/her personal space within a physical or social structure, was institutionalised through the management of private property – the latter ensuring an individual's exclusive access to space, exertion of power within that space, and the regulation of his/her own concealment or exposure (Mandanipour 2003: 230-231). The physical structure of private property is also closely related to the social unit of the household – the house symbolising a separation of the individual or the family from society, the private from the public, and the creation of a 'safe' and 'concealed' space that could protect its inhabitants from a world 'outside' (Mandanipour 2003: 231).

areas such as the...regulation of sexual relations, promulgation of familial duties and obligations, and the arena of political responsibility (Elshtain 1981: 5).

The relationship between the private and the public is linked to notions of respectability – determining which actions should be concealed (thus consigned to the private sphere); or which actions can be displayed and which sides of our identity can be revealed through the participation in public activities (Elshtain 1981: 9). The dichotomous structure of public/private is also supported by a chain of binarisms which provide a hierarchic barrier between normalised identities and their ‘deviant’ counterparts – heterosexual/homosexual, as well as male/female and white/black, being examples of polarised sexual, gendered and racial identities that found their ‘socially acceptable’ expressions located in separate spheres.

In Western discourse, the private/public divide serves as an enabling structure that governs the sexual citizenship of individuals within the sphere of the city (Joseph 1997), as well as the gendering and racialisation of space (Eisenstein 1994). Citizenship is largely conceived of in Western discourses as an abstraction of the ideals of the autonomous white, male subject, with the demarcation of separate private and public spheres built on simultaneous processes of disempowerment and empowerment. As a result, “the demarcation of public and private life within society is an inherently political process that both reflects and reinforces power relations, especially the power relations of gender, race, and class (Sullivan 1995: 128). Modern conceptions of the public and the private are formulated in terms of gender and race, with white males having unlimited access to the public arena and its discourses, whereas females and people of colour were and often still are restricted to the sphere of the private, their “tongues silent on the public issues of the day” (Elshtain 1981: 14). The requirements for ‘rational deliberation’ within the public sphere largely privilege the white, heterosexual male and his “modes of public speech and behaviour by defining them as universal norms” (Crawford 1995: 4).

## CHAPTER 4.1.1: THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC: THE HOMOSEXUAL AND THE HETEROSEXUAL

The demarcation and hierarchic implementation of the private and the public had significant implications for the formation of sexual identities. Public space was established as a place where the 'natural' rights and acts of (white, male, heterosexual) Western society could be expressed, in contrast to 'unnatural' acts that remained concealed in the private realm (Brent Ingram 1997: 39). Central to this conception of public space as a 'core of normality', stands heterosexual culture as a barometer of acceptable sexual conduct. Heterosexuality is intricately tied up with the political public institutions which determine not only the circulation of discourses in the public sphere, but also the transformation of private life into public life (Berlant & Warner 1998: 553). Being so embedded in spatial discourses that it serves as a guideline of the normative, heterosexuality stands as the watermark for 'acceptable' public conduct. Even though sex in itself is usually cited as a form of 'intimate life' that occurs in the private rather than the public sphere, the *traces* of sexuality that are allowed in the public sphere have largely been heterosexual.

Heterosexuality thus came to act in modern Western society as a hegemonic structure that establishes the public as a 'sanitised space', a space of 'pure citizenship' that "bestows on its sexual practices a tacit sense of rightness and normalcy" (Berlant & Warner 1998: 554). Meanwhile homosexuality, as the 'deviant other', came to represent the 'criminal intimacies' that were allowed no official traces or strands of discourse in the public sphere, thus disabling the translation of private expressions of homosexuality into public ones. Homosexuals are, even in contemporary Western society, disconnected from public discourse and relegated to the private sphere. They are veiled in concealment due to "social order that ejects them from appropriateness" and consigns them to marginal, socially insecure positions (Berlant 2004: 8). Even in contemporary society, the public sphere still privileges normative (heterosexual, monogamous, non-fetishistic) sexuality (McCreery 1999: 40). Thus, homosexuals are often represented as 'incompatible' with the moral values of the majority population (Cobb 2005: 254).

Not only is the demarcation of private and public spheres indicative of (hetero)normative regulations that are enforced through discourses of power, but the movement between these spheres can also be a sign of an individual's hierarchic position in society. The private and the

public are spheres that largely determine the physical and social location of an individual, and the movement between them is regulated in terms of privilege. The location within and mobility between the public and private spheres are determined relationally and refer to hierarchic positions ranging from individuals or groups who are marginalised, socially isolated and restricted in their movement, to those who have the agency to freely move or locate themselves between the spheres (Madanipour 2003: 235-237). With the homosexual being one of these identities that is subordinated and marginalised within Western society, the unencumbered movement between the private and the public has largely been reserved for heterosexuals. Consequently, homosexuality is often denied official outlets in public discourse, and transformations of private intimacies (i.e. sexual activities) into public demonstrations of homosexuality, have been impeded by heteronormative regulation.

The few private homosexual intimacies displayed and conducted in the public sphere were (and still are) frequently met with opposition and antagonism. Intimate homosexual enactments within the public sphere have been prone to allegations of 'deviance' and 'degeneracy', thus stigmatising public traces of homosexuality as 'immoral' and synonymous with 'promiscuity'.<sup>62</sup> Public spaces function predominantly as heterosexual spaces, and while heterosexual sex has always been quite public, homosexual sex is conspicuously absent from the public sphere (Mitchell 2000: 172). As a result, the public sphere actively normalises "the power of heterosexuals at the expense of others" (Phillips 2004: 276).

The dichotomous spheres of the public and the private form part of various restrictions that are imposed on marginalised identities. Consequently, lgbt identities are often denied means of public expression, and their erasure in public dialogues and spaces reveals the extent to which

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<sup>62</sup> According to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, the stigmatisation of public displays of homosexuality can be ascribed to the sex act which is the affected nimbus from which heterosexuality abstracts its models of ethics (1998: 555). Berlant and Warner are of the opinion that homosexual pleasure has been demonised by heteronormative discourses to such an extent that its expression in the public sphere is even in contemporary society still regarded as 'coarse' and 'immoral', whereas overt expressions of heterosexuality is found more 'acceptable', 'normal', and 'natural'. While the expression of heterosexual intimacy in contemporary Western consumer, media and national culture is seen as the norm, the display of homosexual eroticism in the public sphere provokes aversion and censure by normative institutions (1998: 560). By spatially equating homosexual desire with public places such as parks, alleys, toilets, adult theatres, bars, gay bathhouses, etc., heteronormative discourse has stigmatised homosexual public acts as 'perverse'. In public discourses pertaining to gay male culture, the trope of the public toilet has been one of the most dominant narrations of homosexuality's spatial enactment (Berlant & Warner 1998: 560), and acts of homosexual intimacy within public spaces are still treated as being essentially 'scatological' and 'unhygienic' in nature.

they have been denied access to official discourse. Yet, even though these identities were often visually suppressed in heteronormative society, they are not entirely invisible. In order to bring these expressions of lgbt sexuality to the fore, the private/public relation between sexuality and space is explored in the following sections. My investigation of carnivalesque identity expressions include both metaphorical and corporeal responses to the private and the public – I incorporate a number of issues, ranging from visual metaphors (Chapter 4.1.2) to corporeal performances (Chapter 4.1.3), to determine the discursive bearing of the private and public spheres on spatial and sexual structures.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1.2: CLOSET SPACES (AND DUSTY CORNERS)**

Sexual identity is largely corporeal and narrated within the immediate (physical) environment of its subject, yet it can also be organised in terms of more abstract topographies of sexuality. The perception of space has strong metaphorical associations, especially with regards to lgbt identities. Sexual identities can be conveyed in terms of spatial metaphors which cannot always be directly traced to physical manifestations, yet they are no less relevant for their seeming immateriality or invisibility.

One of the most important metaphorical spaces that bear directly on private/public conceptions of lgbt identity is the space of the closet. The term 'closet' has been used to distinguish between that which is private and that which is public since approximately four centuries back, while its specific allusion to 'deviant' sexual behaviour is a more contemporary phenomenon which found its expression in public discourses around the 1960's in America and Europe (Lazerson 1981: 274).<sup>63</sup> For the sexually 'deviant' to avoid marginalisation and alienation, being in the closet was an attempt to keep invisible those aspects of his/her sexuality that could possibly cause public scorn or even prosecution (Brent Ingram 1997: 30).

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<sup>63</sup> The closet was generally treated in the English language as a metaphor for behaviour or beliefs that were supposed to be concealed from public scrutiny – it signified some or other 'excess' that people could hide away and that they could keep secret (Urbach 1996: 65). 'Undesirable' aspects of Western society could thus be veiled by keeping it in the closet – 'closet alcoholic', 'closet Muslim', and 'closet rebel' are some terms that were generally used and refer to those 'unfavourable' actions or beliefs that should be kept out of the public eye (Lazerson 1981). Yet, the very naming of these terms indicate an incongruity in the concealing abilities of the closet – while the closet was used as a metaphor for screening negative behaviour, the very act of covering up is actually disclosed in the naming of the closet. By calling someone a 'closet queer', the act of queer closeting by the target of this pejorative term is disclosed, thereby rendering the closet a metaphor for *failing* to conceal rather than successfully concealing. I would argue that the negative implications of this term are situated in the closeting subject's failure to conceal his/her 'undesirable' skeletons from the public.



It also refers to normative discourses of 'public respectability' which expels the 'undesirable' aspects of sexuality to the private, invisible space of the closet. The most prominent disciplining force that operates in the field of sexuality and determines its 'respectability' within the public sphere, is heterosexuality. The closet serves as a mechanism for the concealment of homosexuality in the face of heterosexual power (Phillips 2004: 272), and it can therefore be regarded as a spatial marker of the hierarchic relationship between homosexuals and heterosexuals:

[Certain] places are sexualised in important ways – they are identified with normalised heterosexuality. Heterosexual spaces may reproduce the hegemonic (dominant) sexual order, both ideologically by making this construction of sexuality and the power relations inherent in it appear natural; and materially by physically accommodating and therefore encouraging or enforcing certain heterosexual lifestyles, which are historically constructed rather than 'natural' (Phillips 2004: 273).

With the public sphere treated as a compulsory heterosexual space, the closet has been enforced as the private space of the 'object' and the 'undesirable': the homosexual. Yet the closet, as a metaphor signifying compulsory homosexual passivity and acts of self-imposed censorship, was renegotiated to become one of the most prominent symbols used by gay rights activists. During the *Stonewall Riots* in 1969 in America (see Chapter 3.1 for more details on this event), the closet was identified as a metaphoric tool of homophobic violence and oppression, and it was specifically referred to by gay activists calling people to "Come out of the closets! Into the streets!" (Urbach 1996: 69). To come out (of the closet) took on a particular political meaning as it referred to the then newly established hypothesis that a gay identity could be a positive thing, "something to be yelled in the streets, rather than hidden behind closed doors" (Stanley 1974: 390). The act of coming out of the closet took on significance for politically active gay men and women, it became a *public* statement through which these activists could create their "own distinctive universe of discourse which provided a means of entrée to their social world and to its spatial constitution" (Jackson 1989: 121). The closet thus became established as a metaphoric space that, once countered by acts of disclosure, signified a subject's access to gay discourses and subcultural formations.

### CHAPTER 4.1.2.1: THE CLOSET PROBLEMATISED

The concept of the closet is problematic for its polarised reduction of the gay subject as either being fully in the closet, hiding from detection, or as escaping the closet in order to take on his/her rightful gay identity. Eve Sedgwick's *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1990)<sup>64</sup>, specifically underscores the closet as an in-between space; thereby destabilising the inside/outside dualism that was embedded in its metaphoric structure. The closet, which Sedgwick has called the "fundamental architecture of gay oppression", entails a liminal position taken on by homosexuals where they are simultaneously inside and outside the closet (1990: 71). Treating the closet as a space of simultaneous concealment and exposure, Sedgwick sees the closet as an "open secret" and a way of "knowing by not knowing" (1990: 80). 'Being' out of the closet is problematised by Sedgwick for its oversimplification of the continuous process of disclosure:

The deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption means that, like Wendy in *Peter Pan*, people find new walls springing up around them even as they drowse: every encounter with a new classful of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets...and requisitions of secrecy and disclosure (1990: 68).

Drawing on Sedgwick's theory of continuous disclosure, Henry Urbach problematises the 'act' of coming out which is often regarded as the 'origin' of gay identity. Urbach is specifically critical towards the imagining of the closet as a space that, once 'escaped from', bears no influence on notions of self-representation. Urbach argues that, whereas heterosexuality is presumed, "coming out can never be accomplished once and for all...the binary logic of the closet/room pair, the rigid opposition of in and out, does not account for the dynamic entanglement of these spaces, the ways in which they constantly separate and reattach, the ways in which one is *both* in and out, *neither* in nor out" (1996: 69). The words 'I am out/gay' are, according to Urbach, inefficient in their description of sexual identity since they ignore the

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<sup>64</sup> In this book, Sedgwick investigates nineteenth-century American and English literature to deconstruct the workings of the closet. She explores the closet as a site of oppression through which the category of the homosexual "was distinctively constituted as secrecy" (1990: 73). By deconstructing certain binary oppositions (such as natural/unnatural, secrecy/disclosure, discipline/terrorism, majority/minority, wholeness/decadence, etc), Sedgwick comes to the conclusion that the closet, as it is acted out in various spaces, "codifies an excruciating system of double binds, systematically oppressing gay people, identities, and acts" (1990: 70).

mutability and multiplicity of identity constructions (1996: 69).<sup>65</sup> The closet is rather emphasised by Urbach as a space that presents identities as multiple (rather than dichotomous) queer constructions that are played out in social space.

Acts of disclosure, of coming out, form part of a continuous process of identity exposures. Different identities are revealed and performed in different contexts, and coming out is not a singular, autonomous act or identity performance. Identities (such as gayness) are constantly reiterated and 'brought out'. Furthermore, the discourse of coming out often presupposes that a singular identity would be disclosed and that this act would entail the subject ultimately verbalising and visualising his/her identity by declaring 'I am...(gay)'. By treating coming out as the final enactment of a singular identity, the range of identities that might be disclosed in processes of visualisation and narration are ignored. For a certain subject, the act of disclosure might entail revealing a bisexual identity in a certain context, yet in a different context where the subject is more at ease a gay, or queer or sadomasochistic identity might be disclosed, for example. Coming out is thus a process that is contingent upon various contexts within which different identities may be enunciated.

Not only may the identities that are disclosed by a subject be fluctuating and multiple, but the acts of disclosure (or denial) might also vary. Not presenting oneself as explicitly heterosexual in a certain context might be read as a sign of homosexuality, or not defending accusations of homosexuality might be read as a sign thereof. Even though multiple identities can be performed by a range of disclosures and silences, sexual identities are often reduced to crude binarisms of disclosed/concealed, visible/invisible, present/absent, public/private, etc. This is particularly true of carnival, where the act of participation is often seen as the visual defiance of the closet, while those who do not wish to perform are stereotyped as not being completely out of the closet. This stereotypical assumption of a liberated and disclosed gay identity as inherently visible is unpacked in the following section by paying particular attention to the visual expression of the closet during carnival.

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<sup>65</sup> The dichotomous structure of either being in or out of the closet radically constricts the way queer identity is formulated and, according to Urbach, this binarism is ineffective for narrating diverse sexual identities. "To come out and declare 'I am gay'...is to submit to a host of ideological imperatives: self-unity ('I'); immutability ('am'); and the given characterisation ('gay'). These are crude and brittle words, unable to capture the diachronicity and multivalence of identity and sexuality as played out in social space" (Urbach 1996: 69).

#### CHAPTER 4.1.2.2: CARNIVAL AND THE CLOSET VISUALISED

The closet can thus be regarded as a metaphor for homosexual secrecy, as a “term used to describe denial, concealment, erasure, or ignorance of lesbians and gay men” (Brown 2000: 1). With the closet also established as a space that can be resisted through disclosure, the act of ‘coming out’ is presented in contemporary gay discourse “as a salvational epistemologic certainty against the very equivocal privacy afforded by the closet” (Sedgwick 1990: 71). The secrecy of the closet is pitted against the disclosure of ‘coming out’, and in this manner gay identity is discursively constructed as necessarily visible and knowledgeable. In the same manner, to be ‘out of the closet’ and to visually display certain prescribed gay cultural codes, is often regarded as the condition for belonging to a gay subculture (Blasius 1992: 654). Visibility is therefore presented as an integral part of a ‘liberated’ gay identity, an important aspect of raising gay consciousness, and a precondition for access to gay (sub)cultural formations. The visual performance of a gay identity is regarded as a simultaneous site of liberation and struggle against normative oppression (De Waal & Manion 2006: 9), and gay visibility is therefore presented (particularly by gay activists) as an integral part of gay pride and identity.

There are, however, certain problems regarding the presentation of gay liberation as essentially visible. Even though this account may present a positive move towards the equality and freedom of lbgt individuals and subcultures, the notion of ‘progress’, of a move from concealment to open celebration, can in effect give rise to a teleological conception of visible gayness as the logical result of identity disclosure. The emphasis that is placed on being out of the closet and presenting an openly gay identity can bring into being the notion that a gay identity is essentially visible or displayable. The ‘ideal’ gay subject would accordingly be seen as someone who “moves from the ‘immature’ concealment of his or her sexuality to the ‘mature’ visibility of political participation in the public sphere” (Manalansan 2003: 212). The construction of a gay identity around visibility creates the assumption that it is ‘immature’ or ‘closeted’ not to participate in the visual presentation of this ‘liberated’ identity. Consequently, events such as carnival and particularly the *Cape Town Pride Parade* are seen as platforms on which it is necessary to display ‘mature’, openly lbgt identities. As the name reveals, this parade is centred on notions of ‘pride’, and the visual display of an lbgt identity is read in this context as synonymous for self-respect and general well-being – see Figure 6.



**Figure 6.**  
Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2008).  
Digital Photograph.

By renegotiating Descartes's famous line of reasoning – “I think therefore I am” – this participant of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is establishing the autonomy of his identity by equating his selfhood to being out (of the closet). Descartes's claim is central to the establishment of the Cartesian subject that rests on the notion that rational thought (the act of ‘thinking’) is a prerequisite for human existence. The participant's poster renegotiates this idea by presenting the act of ‘coming out’ as the most important requirement for the establishment of selfhood by non-heterosexual people. Coming out of the closet, and thus having an open and visible gay identity, are presented as the highest criteria for lgbt subjectivity and the basis for these identity formations. The corollary is implicitly also stated: that it is shameful to ‘hide’ in the closet.

Yet, whereas *visibility* may be an important aspect of gay festivals and parades, *invisibility* can also be used as a mechanism to create protest. This is evident in the participants' display of their identity, or more accurately the lack thereof, in Figure 7.



**Figure 7.**  
Pierre Oosthuysen, *Untitled* (1990). Newspaper  
Photograph. (De Waal & Manion 2006).

This photograph, which appeared in a South African newspaper, documents the first *Pride Parade* which was hosted in Johannesburg in 1990 during which certain participants covered their heads with paper bags in order to conceal their identity. This occurrence also exemplifies a somewhat ambiguous take on visibility – while the physical and visible presence of these participants can be seen as a form of protest, their anonymity and the invisibility of their personal identities indicates a fear of homophobic discrimination that still pervaded the South African context. This photograph indicates that acts of disclosure during carnival are not so much singular, once-off ‘achievements’, but rather processes through which different aspects of gay/queer identities may be exposed.

A queer expression of a range of fluctuating sexual identities is still debilitated by certain stereotypical assumptions. Being completely out of the closet would be one of these stereotypical structures that strengthens the popular belief that openly displayed gayness is always marked by visible, physical difference, and that it has to be at variance to a straight identity. This can, according to Kopelson (2002), be ascribed to the act of coming out that has been reduced in the mainstream media to a ‘cultural cliché’. Kopelson is of the contention that, as coming out has been sanitised and assimilated into the dominant culture, this stereotyped act

of disclosure disguises rather than reveals the complexities of sexual identity (2002: 22). The 'act' of coming out severely limits the range of homosexual expressions:

To come out is always to *come out as*, it cannot disturb processes of regulatory categorization. Because it is to come out as heterosexuality's oppositional other, it cannot disturb the binary logic that surrounds sexuality, nor the attendant process of privileging and devaluing that surrounds this particular and every other pervasive binary system (Kopelson 2002: 22).

Carnavalesque disclosures of identity are far from simple and, as Figure 7 indicates, the closet is not a space that can merely be opposed by finally 'being out', but it is a space that indicates a range of divulging and disguising displays. Yet, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* can also perpetuate the stereotypical assumption that 'being out' and visibly gay equates selfhood and pride – as seen in Figure 6. In this manner, visible gayness is pitted against straightness from whose domination it supposedly escapes by acts of disclosure and identity enunciation. Yet, the formulation of lgbt identity is severely limited in expression as it articulates its liberation from heterosexual hegemony in heteronormative vocabularies. The binary formations of private/public and closeted/disclosed in carnivalesque expressions of identity are thus simultaneously countered through articulations of sexual multiplicity and perpetuated through essentialist reductions of gay disclosure as a totally liberating activity.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1.3: BODY SPACES: HIDDEN ORIFICES AND NARRATIONS OF IDENTITY**

The distinction between the private and the public rests largely on the perceived 'respectability' of identities presented within social and political spaces. Certain identities and sexualities are granted more access to public discourses and they can thus discursively and spatially disclose, visualise and enact more (intimate) facets of their make-up than others. Yet, it is not only the 'respectability' of identity constructions, but also the 'acceptability' of corporeal expressions, that are determined by the discourses of the public sphere. According to Ali Madanipour (2003: 22), the body is closely linked to private/public distinctions as it is regarded as the primary physical boundary between the 'self' and 'other' in modernist discourse. It is also linked to the personal spaces that are created within or intimately around the 'self', and the public spaces that are created for people to share. Private space is thus linked to personal space – "the space that a person and the others observe around his/her

body, as the extension of the body” (Madanipour 2003: 22). A desired level of privacy can be maintained through controlling the body and its representation, and the movement between personal and public spaces can be manipulated by monitoring the amount of private (bodily) detail that is revealed to a public.

Discourses of ‘respectability’ determine the embodied visibility of certain identities – corporeal expressions are intimately linked to the amount of flesh and the type of visual signifiers that certain genders and sexualities can put on display in the public sphere. An investigation of discourses that give rise to the notion of a ‘respectable’ embodiment of identity can draw attention to the degree to which “heteropatriarchal society produces normative spaces based upon the desires and characteristics of able-bodied and heterosexual men” (Landzelius 2004: 281). Heteronormativity dominates the expression of identity in Western spaces as it is the locus of meaning against which the ‘respectability’ and ‘validity’ of other sexual and corporeal expressions are determined. The difference in the bodily displays of sexual identity in the private and public spheres are indicative of the normative processes that grant or deny authority to the body’s presentation. In this regard, heterosexual bodily expressions and sexual enactments differ less in their private and public display of intimacy than other expressions as heterosexuality are seen as the norm from which other sexualities ‘deviate’. For this reason, homosexual people are often tolerated in mainstream society as long as their intimacies and sexually active bodies remain private, and are not translated into public displays of affection or desire.

Even though the visual display of the body is clearly influenced by discourses of private and public, the body is not a passive object that completely yields to all discursive practices. I rather propose that the body, its visual presentation and its discursive formations are interdependent as they influence and shape one another. The body is the primary physical and sensual precondition for discourse: “the shaping of the body takes place through the senses, it is through the faculties of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch including motility, that ‘performative interpellations’ of bodies takes place, and without the senses, an individual can take part in neither space nor discourse” (Landzelius 2007: 289-290). The body thus acts as a vehicle to inhabit or move within space, as well as a mechanism to access, create and manipulate discourse.



The interdependent relationship between bodies, space and discursive structures is particularly visible during carnival which acts as a platform on which to display the body, the identity formations attached to it, as well as the physical and discursive spaces within which it moves. In the following sections, I demonstrate the degree to which the body can act as a site of transgression within the public arena during carnivalesque activities by employing Bakhtin's notion of the material bodily principle in my analysis of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. From this discussion, I investigate different carnivalesque reactions to normative discourses during which gay/queer identity constructions are visualised and performed by male and female bodies.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1.3.1: BAKHTIN AND THE GROTESQUE BODY**

Bakhtin places particular emphasis on the body's relation to public space, specifically on the material body as a site of transgression during the public spectacle of carnival. By drawing on grotesque realism<sup>66</sup>, Bakhtin highlights the human body as a physical, reproducing, growing organism. The human body during carnival is synonymous with "food, drink, defecation, and sexual life" – all of which are employed during carnival to temporarily suspend the norms and prohibitions of everyday life (Bakhtin 1968: 15, 18). The material body acts as a negation of the social symbolic order by transgressing the boundaries between high and low, public and private cultures (Wills 1989: 137). The body is also utilised during carnival to disrupt social hierarchies and critique bourgeois society by bringing the grotesque, the overtly sexual and corporeal, into public spaces (Stallybrass & White 1993: 291).

For Bakhtin, the grotesque material body reflects transformation and metamorphosis since it is not a closed, completed unit, but an unfinished, growing and transgressing thing. Bakhtin criticises conventional notions of the material body for showing corporeal acts "only when the borderlines dividing the body from the outside world were sharply defined... [thus] the accent was placed on the completed, self-sufficient individuality of the given body" (1968: 29). The grotesque conception of the bodily principle counters this notion of a singular, autonomous body by emphasising carnival as a process of "becoming" (Bakhtin 1968:224) through which

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<sup>66</sup> Grotesque realism is a genre that opposes those fields that are seen as 'high' (such as art and literature) by means of parody, and it stands in stark opposition to those 'official' discourses produced by the church and the state. For Bakhtin, the field of grotesque realism entails the essential principle of "degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body" (1968: 19).

the participants are made vividly aware of their materiality, bodily nature, and relation to the earth:

Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation (Bakhtin 1968: 26).

The material body is treated as a sprouting organism with genital organs that draw attention to its begetting, transforming and disclosing nature. Yet, Bakhtin argues, conventional notions of the body (as they circulated in the European discourses), conceived of it as a:

strictly completed, finished product... it was isolated, alone, fenced off from all other bodies. All signs of its unfinished character, of its growth and proliferation were eliminated; its protuberances and offshoots were removed, its convexities (signs of new sprouts and buds) smoothed out, its apertures closed...The accent was placed on the completed, self-sufficient individuality of the given body. Corporal acts were shown only when the borderlines dividing the body from the outside world were sharply defined (1968: 29)

The material body is thus proffered by Bakhtin as a means of countering enclosed physical and social bodies. By mobilising the body as a growing structure and by bringing the grotesque, the overtly sexual and corporeal, into bourgeois society, carnival transgresses the public space and its normative conventions. As this notion of the open, virile body is important for my own investigation of carnivalesque corporeality and its transgression of the public sphere, Bakhtin's formulation of the material body is used as a basis for my discussion of oppositions of the normative as they are embodied during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1.3.2: CARNIVAL AND AMBIVALENT DISPLAYS OF THE GAY MALE BODY**

During the *Cape Town Pride Parade* the male body in particular is emphasised for its relation to the space within which it is situated. The overt display of the body and the regulation of its exposure through sartorial choices are evident in the performances of the male participants of carnival during which the 'sprouting' nature of their bodies are often highlighted. Being emphasised for its materiality, the musculature and genital organs of the male body are often used to draw attention to the begetting and disclosing nature of corporeality. In particular, male sexual organs are used or referenced during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* to highlight the presence of gay sexuality in Cape Town and to question the 'public respectability' of this city as a heteronormative space.

Yet, the male body is not simply employed to disrupt the sexual sanctity of the public sphere, but also shows signs of yielding to normative discourses in its carnivalesque presentation. While the male genitals may be used during carnival to question heteronormativity, the emphasis on musculature suggests that homonormative processes are also circulating amongst men who identify as gay. In addition, these normative processes are applicable to the female body and its visual narration of gay identity discourses, such as 'butch' and 'femme' corporeal and sartorial signifiers which are often mobilised during carnival. Gay female identities and bodies can thus be studied as visual expressions of the transgression and/or perpetuation of public discourses of the normative.

In the following sections, I explore the simultaneous dislocation and maintenance of a normative public sphere by investigating the body and its display during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. I examine the questioning of normative space by participants who actively draw attention to their bodies as sexual, begetting, unfinished organisms, and I demonstrate how normative space is conceded to by participants who present their body as a contained vehicle of a 'normal' gay identity.

#### CHAPTER 4.1.3.2.1: MALE GENITALS AND THE 'DEVIANT' GAY BODY

The disruption of the private and public spheres at the *Cape Town Pride Parade* can clearly be seen in the way that clothing is used to transgress notions of respectability and defy the moral censorship of the public sphere by drawing attention to the naked and uncovered parts of the male body. Male musculature, along with the genital area, is often emphasised during carnivals to draw attention to the material body – Figure 8, showing two males leading a procession of people, is a good example of such a display of male musculature.



**Figure 8.**  
Wayne Hendriks, *Untitled* (2006).  
Digital Photograph. (Cape Town  
Pride Gallery. 2006)

The male body is not only emphasised by what is revealed, but also what is covered in clothing – sartorial choices therefore plays a crucial role in the display of musculature. Where form-fitting clothes (such as jeans and T-shirts) are specifically chosen by gay men to reveal the contours of their muscles and even genitals (Cole 2000: 96), the two men in Figure 8 clearly want to highlight their masculine features by appearing bare-chested. Their naked upper bodies and form-fitting jeans draw attention to their muscles and can be regarded as an attempt to not only draw awareness to their masculinity, but also their sexual attractiveness and potency. The male body is sexualised through the display of muscles, crotches, and nipples, thus highlighting what Bakhtin would term the body as a 'sprouting' organ(ism). In this regard, male musculature can be read as a medium that draws attention to the sexual nature of the body, and its display during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* thus imbues the public space (and specifically Cape Town) with male homosexuality.

The sexual appeal of underwear and swimwear, and the issues of 'immodesty' that it raises within the public sphere, is important to consider when looking at the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. Underwear is often associated with eroticism and the exposure of underwear draws particular attention to the genital region (Willett & Cunnington 1951: 11, 13). The public display of both underwear and swimwear underscores associations of exhibitionism, narcissism<sup>67</sup>, and even fetishism<sup>68</sup>, as these garments draw attention to the sexual and muscular attributes of (inter alia) the gay male body (Cole 2000: 131-132). As seen in Figure 9, underwear is used by participants of this parade as a mechanism to invert social stability by challenging notions of respectability and modesty.



**Figure 9.**

Anonymous, *Untitled* (2004).

Digital Photograph. (*Cape Town Pride Gallery*. 2004)

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<sup>67</sup> Homosexuals have, especially in psychoanalytic theory, been linked to narcissism, and their identities have accordingly been perceived as “inherently pathological, disturbed, and perverse, and this because of an inbuilt, narcissistic desire for the same” (Dollimore 1991: 249). Homosexual sartorial choices are also linked to narcissistic acts as the gay male’s obsession with his own appearance is supposedly exemplified in his self-conscious employment of clothing. The homosexual man is often stereotyped in the media and gay subculture as obsessively fastidious in his appearance, with bodily enhancements, grooming and clothing (such as underwear and swimwear) playing key roles in the display of the gay male body.

<sup>68</sup> Valerie Steele argues that the fetishisation of male underwear is significant within the gay subculture – men’s underwear is marked for their erotic appeal, representing an intense “crotch-consciousness” within gay subcultures (1996: 128). Since there is still a powerful taboo against penis exposure, Steele argues that “underwear exposure is the closest you can get to full male nudity” (1996: 129).

The participant in this photograph (the 'golden god' Tim Hamilton, an actor in gay adult movies [Hayward 2004]) wears only an elephant g-string; an item of 'novelty' underwear that is usually associated with 'kinky' or 'alternative' (non-reproductive and/or non-heterosexual) sexual activities. This piece of underwear is of particular importance – whereas underwear is usually regarded as something that is 'hidden away' for the sake of modesty, the public display of 'novelty' underwear in this context represents a shift from the private to the public domain of gay/queer sexuality. This piece of underwear draws attention to the genital area (with the blue trunk of the elephant offering a humorous visual substitute for and elaboration on the actual member and its dimensions) and emphasises the virile and sexual aspects of the male body. These properties of male homosexuality, which would 'normally' be consigned to the private realm for the sake of 'decency', are brought out into the public sphere. Thus, those anatomies and (bits of) clothing that would not see the light of day in everyday life, can be mobilised during carnival in the performance of gay/queer identity.

Acting as the last layer of decency, underwear can draw attention to that which is cradled in its folds of fabric. Participants of carnival specifically employ underwear for its ability to draw attention to *potential* penis exposure. This is evident in the performance of the participants in Figure 10.



**Figure 10.**

Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2008).

Digital Photograph.

Their body language clearly suggests acts of oral sex with the one participant's gaping mouth placed strategically next to his partner's crotch. Yet any 'overt' indecency is countered by the black underwear that the standing ('receiving') partner wears. Even though it is only a suggestion, the performance immediately evokes homosexual sex and invites onlookers to complete the performed act in their imagination. Yet the physical, virile male body and particularly the genitals are only hinted at, and the unfailing concealment of the penis draws attention to issues of indecency that still circulate in normative public space.

Clothing can thus be used during carnival as a layer that simultaneously conforms to the normative regulation of the public sphere (by concealing the male genitals) and yet renegotiates its boundaries by performing and revealing aspects of male sexuality that would not usually be found within the public spheres of Cape Town and South African society. Furthermore, the transgressive use of underwear can be seen as a mechanism to concurrently appropriate and eroticise different forms of dress. Various forms of clothing are used during carnivalesque performances of identity to bring the private – the bodily and the sexual – into public sight. In Figure 11 for instance, different forms of dress are combined to draw attention to these participants' sexual nature.



**Figure 11.**

Craig Sydney, *Untitled* (2004).

Digital Photograph. (Sydney 2006).

By emphasising the erotic appeal of not only underwear but also of uniforms, the participant on the left appropriates symbols of a sailor's uniforms (such as the hat, and the colours blue and white) and reconstructs this image (by wearing a see-through pair of trousers) to draw attention to the genital area. This participant exemplifies the common appropriation of military uniforms during carnival by gay subcultures. Where the uniforms of especially soldiers and sailors have been recognised for their erotic appeal to gay men, the appropriation of these uniforms by gay men can be seen as a "fetishisation of 'masculine icons'" (Cole 2000: 21-22). Sailors form an integral part of gay visual iconography, and serve as archetypes of eroticised hyper-masculinity.<sup>69</sup> The visual repertoire drawn upon by the one participant in Figure 11 is largely based on the icon (and stereotype) of the sailor which is widely circulated in Western society for its erotic appeal within the gay subculture. By simultaneously employing the uniform of masculine icons and underwear, the virility and eroticism of the male body is emphasised.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1.3.2.2: MALE MUSCULATURE AND THE 'NATURAL' GAY BODY**

Even though male musculature as it is displayed during carnival may temporarily leave disruptive spatial traces of homosexuality in the public landscape, it can also be used to develop certain normative identities. The emphasis that is placed on defined muscles as a condition for sexual desirability (within gay subcultures and society at large) has led to the translation of male musculature into a stereotypical gay identity; namely that of the 'macho' gay male, or the 'Muscle Mary' (Cole 2000: 65). This identity is mainly constructed by taking on 'butch' and masculine styles of dress and enhancing the physicality of the male body (Cole 2000: 93-94). This identity is primarily characterised by an emphasis on clothes, mannerisms and physical appearance as signs of strength, ruggedness and potency. According to Randy Alfred, the masculine identity was also developed in terms of sexual selection – he argues that "many of these men are simply wearing the costumes that experience has taught them will attract the very men they find sexually attractive" (1982: 22). The augmented male body is thus used to conform to norms of what is perceived as sexually desirable. Body conscious narratives of sexuality pervade gay subcultures and, as the popular maxim 'no pecs, no sex'

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<sup>69</sup> Jason Goldman argues that the image of the sexually available, 'ever-horny' sailor appeared in the early 1900s, and that this image henceforth constituted "a long-standing presence in gay male visual culture" and became "an easily recognisable mainstay of the gay visual vernacular in the West" (2002). The image of the sailor was idolised in gay subcultures for its rugged masculinity and virile physicality, and became an archetype of sexual freedom (Goldman 2002).



indicates, the appearance of the muscular gay male body is directly equated with sexual desirability in many subcultural structures.

The emphasis that is placed on the appearance of the body seems to be pivotal to the projection of masculinity by gay men. The achievement of an ultra-masculine appearance and the expression of 'butchness' are often linked with bodybuilding and gym culture (Cole 2000: 119). The physique of the ideal gay male (especially since the late 1970's) is formulated in terms of gym culture, according to which tight buttocks, 'washboard' abdominals, as well as developed biceps and pectoral muscles are perceived as central to a 'macho' gay physique (Cole 2000: 119). The use of bodybuilding by gay men is not only a way to promote muscle development (as an expression of strength and virility), but can also be seen as a form of 'clothing'; as a physical garment of flesh and muscle that can be 'worn' and 'enhanced' to suit a gay man's expression of his own 'normal' masculine identity. John Rechy makes the keen observation that "the queen protects herself by dressing in women's clothes, and the bodybuilder protects himself in muscles – so called 'men's clothes'" (quoted in Cole 2000: 124).

Corporeal expressions and bodily enhancements for the sake of 'normalcy' can be an important defence mechanism employed to protect a gay identity and its performer. The adoption of a muscular, 'normal' male physique offers protection against homophobic discourses that link homosexuality with illness and weakness. Not only has the homosexual body been a site of scrutiny in medical discourses that attempted to equate the psychological 'deviancy' of homosexuals with bodily features, but even in contemporary society the homosexual body is seen as a sign of illness. This is quite evident in the stigmatisation of homosexual (and particularly gay male) bodies as the primary site and origin of the AIDS-epidemic. Normative discourses circulating in Western culture still portray AIDS as an essentially 'gay disease'; a term which amplifies "preinscribed homophobic mythologies...in its pseudo-evolutionary presentation of male homosexuality as a stage doomed to extinction" (Sedgwick 1990: 128-129). With HIV/AIDS stigmatised as the result of 'decadence' (Sedgwick 1990: 128), stemming from acts of 'promiscuous intimacy' between gay men (Berlant & Warner 1998: 560), the construction of a contemporary gay identity reflects efforts made by gay men to dissociate this disease from their self-conduct and visual presentation. The panic produced by heterosexual politics about AIDS 'contamination' and the 'uncleanliness' of gay sexual behaviour has led to a renewed effort on the part of gay men to (re)establish the 'respectability' of their sexual identities and practices. One of the responses by gay men

to HIV/AIDS and the resulting homophobia, has been the 'cleaning up' of their sexual act and the presentation of their sexual identities as uncontaminated (Dowsett 1993: 704).

The development of muscular physiques is also a strategic mechanism to protect gay men from stigmatisation and to counter the AIDS taboo. The masculine 'gym body' has become an easily recognised icon of gay masculinity, as well as a symbol of health. The internalisation and the visual translation of this body image have become strategic ways for gay men to underscore the fact that they are not suffering from AIDS-related diseases (Shernoff 2001).<sup>70</sup> A muscular image has become a way for gay men to visually demonstrate their HIV-negative status or to 'hide' their HIV-positive status by "regaining control" over their bodies and "feel [ing] strong and powerful in the face of a health emergency as well as a sometimes hostile society" (Shernoff 2001).

The masculine male body can thus be used to conceal or counter certain gay-related stereotypes, such as HIV/AIDS being a 'gay disease'. The masculinisation of the male body can be used to oppose negative labels (such as physical or moral illness) that are attached to gay identities. Yet, this also reveals that certain corporeal expressions imply self-policing – the trope of the masculine gay body can act as a norm which counters charges of 'deviation' and 'perversion'. By establishing a standard for a 'natural', masculine body, men who identify as gay can measure their own corporeal 'acceptability' in public society. Even though HIV/AIDS may not be directly cited as the main motivation for adopting a masculine identity, the presentation of 'healthy', 'clean' gay masculine bodies can generally be read as counteractions of previous stigmatisations (be it of gay men as essentially 'weak', 'deviant', 'feminine', 'perverted', 'sick', etc.).

During the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, a 'healthy' gay identity is enacted in the public sphere, rather than any overt HIV-negative statements that are made to counter discrimination. Quite conspicuously, HIV is often erased from visual performances of identity during this carnival as participants avoid any reference to disease or infection. Male participants rather tend to

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<sup>70</sup> Michael Shernoff argues in his article *Steroids and the Pursuit of Bigness* that during and before the 1970's many gay men were generally slim and only a minority were well built or muscled (2001). Yet, as AIDS spread amongst gay subcultures in the 1980's and the people who died of AIDS suffered from severe weight loss, gay men started to "pump up" and use weight training in response to the stigmatisation caused by the AIDS epidemic (2001).

present 'clean', 'healthy' identities by employing signifiers (such as masculine attributes) to indicate their 'normality'. Bodily health is subsequently translated into moral health as the lack (or concealment) of physical traces of 'illness' or 'weakness' are translated into signs of sexual 'decency'.

The participants of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* in Figure 12 use their tanned, young, masculine bodies to display physical 'healthiness', while their relationship signifies 'normality' which is visually enacted as they march hand-in-hand (in matching his-and-his white uniforms) down Cape Town's streets. Their confident bodies, decorously white clothes, and teamlike appearance are all signifiers of gay 'normalcy' and 'wellbeing'. Bodily wellbeing is also equated with moral goodness as their 'normal' physical appearance is (inadvertently or consciously) used to signify a 'decent', 'stable' relationship.



**Figure 12.**

Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2007).

Digital Photograph.

The masculine gay male body – with its implications of 'healthiness' and 'normality' – appears to be yielding to the gaze of a heteronormative public. In this regard, the male body differs from Bakhtin's formulation of carnivalesque corporeality which emphasises its begetting, open and unfinished character. As I have revealed in my discussion, the carnivalesque display of the

male body can emphasise its autonomous, self-enclosed construction in order to counter heteronormative discourses of 'gay illness'. By presenting the body as an entity that is enclosed, stereotypes of general gay exposure to illness is countered. Yet, even though the masculine body may seem to provide gay men with a mechanism to counter stereotypes, the 'macho', 'normal' gay body is in itself another stereotype that dictates a new (homo)norm for gay identities. The male body is forced to enunciate certain myths of 'healthy gayness' by presenting itself as an autonomous, uncontaminable unit free from physical and moral disease.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1.3.3.1: CARNIVAL AND POLARISED DISPLAYS OF THE GAY FEMALE BODY**

The degree to which some identities and bodies can be displayed publicly (during events such as carnival, for instance), has been read as a barometer of the transformation of private, 'closet' space into public, visible space. This celebration of visible signifiers can clearly be identified during carnival where the trope of visibility in the construction of 'liberated' sexual identities is very important. Lisa Walker argues that "privileging visibility has become a tactic of late twentieth-century identity politics, in which participants often symbolise their demands for social justice by celebrating visible signifiers of difference that have historically targeted them for discrimination" (1993: 868). Gay female identities and bodies can also be studied as visual expressions of the transgression and/or perpetuation of public discourses of the normative. Like male performances, gay female identities and corporeal expressions also simultaneously oppose and yield to normative institutions.

Gay female (or lesbian) identities and their enactment are as multiple and diverse in their spatial and corporeal configuration as any other sexual identity:

The diversity of...lesbianism is enormous...We cannot assume any coherent or unified collective identity when we recognise the diversity of definitions and experiences of lesbians...Lesbian experiences are not only fragmented within 'lesbian cultures', but also within cultures dominated by heterosexuality" (Stacey cited in Vicinus 1987: 468).

However, expectations of gay female visibility and the process of 'coming out' (with its dualistic connotations), severely limit the narration of lesbianism. One of the most prominent narrations and enactments of 'outed' or 'visible' lesbianism can be found in the dichotomous

structure of 'butch' and 'femme' identities. The construction of this identity pair emerged as one of the most distinct discursive formations for female gayness. This identity pair rests on the polarisation and categorisation of certain 'identifiable' lesbian traits. Being established on essentialised notions of a binary opposition between masculine and feminine traits, the "notion of 'butch' and 'femme' was a mirror of the power structure in the hegemonic discourse [and] heterosexist patriarchy" which dominated lesbian corporeal expressions up until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (Valentine 1993: 245). The 'butch-femme' identity pair emerged in lesbian subcultures as a "unique organising system" which drew on the dominant gender roles and physical appearances ascribed by heterosexual society to males and females (Crawley 2001: 177). According to Gayle Rubin, normative, heterosexual society plays a fundamental role in the construction of a 'butch-femme' identity:

Butch and femme are ways of coding identities and behaviours that are both connected to and distinct from standard societal roles for men and women... 'Femmes' identify as feminine within the larger culture; 'butches' identify primarily as masculine or prefer masculine signals, personal appearance, and styles" (Rubin 1992: 467)

The categories of 'butch' and 'femme' have become typecast conceptual frameworks that have both been employed for and enforced upon gay women. 'Femme' is seen as the 'normal' part of the 'butch-femme' pair (except for her sexual and emotional relationship with women), while 'butch' refers to general gender non-conformity in appearance (determined by sartorial choices and corporeal expressions), action, and sexual relationships with other women (Crawley 2001: 177). Within the 'butch-femme' identity pair, the 'femme' identity is largely regarded as inferior in status as 'butchness' is interpreted as a means of obtaining a dominant position (Faderman 1991: 170). Problematically, the very patriarchal norms that are adopted by 'butch' lesbians to assert their own dominance, is a perpetuation of sexist beliefs that women (or 'fems') are subordinate to males (or 'butches').

The 'butch-femme' unit is also particularly problematic in its administration of the visibility of gay female identity within the public sphere. The 'butch-femme' subject position is linked to the paradigm of visibility insofar as "the butch emerges as visible while the femme is included in the identity 'lesbian' through her association with the butch" (Walker 1993: 879). Within Western society, the narrative of 'coming out' constructed 'butch' as the 'authentic' lesbian

identity, and in the mid 1900's it was presented within lesbian subcultures as a reliable way to ensure autonomy (Walker 1993: 881). The 'femmes' as the 'invisible' part of lesbian identity, are "the victims of a double dismissal: in the past they did not appear culturally different enough from heterosexual women to be seen as breaking gender taboos, and today they do not appear feminist enough...to merit attention or respect for being ground-breaking women" (Nestle 1992: 140). The enactment of a 'butch' identity is stereotyped as the marker of lesbian 'authenticity' and 'visibility', as representing a 'core self' that comprises of blatantly gay signifiers (Grahn 1984: 85). Meanwhile, the 'femme' identity is equated with 'invisibility', and is stereotyped as "boring, passive and unliberated" (Grahn 1984: 157-158). So, while the 'butch's' sexual style was stereotyped in lesbian subcultures as "expressive of her radical lesbian consciousness", the 'femme's' identity was perceived as indicative of "her subjection to heterosexual definitions of femininity" (Walker 1993: 883). The 'butch-femme' unit thus acted as a discursive construct that naturalised socially constructed categories within lesbian subcultures by specifically privileging the *visible* aspects of identity. 'Butch' and 'femme' have increasingly been criticised by feminists since the 1970's for this perpetuation of stereotypical gender roles. Contemporary narrations of gayness/queerness have moved away from the notion that 'butch' and 'femme' are primary descriptions of lesbian gender roles<sup>71</sup>, towards a critique of 'butch' and 'femme' as gendered sexual enactments that replicates the power of oppressive, patriarchal gender structures (Crawley 2001: 179). Notions of 'butchness' and 'femmeness' as 'uncomplicated', 'essential' and 'natural' identity traits are thus problematic, especially if one is seen as being more 'natural' and thus more 'visible' than the other.

The visibility of 'butch' or 'femme' identities is a contentious issue, especially since these identities are narrated in terms of *either* conforming to *or* opposing gender or sexual norms. Their value as sites of identification is linked to their visibility and supposed non-conformity

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<sup>71</sup> The notion of 'butch' and 'femme' as essential descriptions of lesbian identities is evident in the work of certain writers who treat these categories as a system of 'natural' sexual desires. For Esther Newton, lesbian 'butchness' is not a mere construct, but is indicative of gender nonconformity, and it is therefore an 'original expression' of one's 'true self' (1984: 570). For Joan Nestle, 'butch-femme' are specific gestures aimed at dominant, heterosexual society, signifying lesbian's erotic independence from normative regulations insofar as they are supposedly 'self-constructed' and 'self-realised' identities that deviate from society's prescribed notions of how a woman should look or act (1992: 14). To my opinion, these descriptions of Newton and Nestle are idealised and essentialist in the way that they posit 'true', 'autonomous' 'butch' and 'femme' gay selves that exists independently of the structures they seem to replicate. Yet I do not wish to present these accounts of 'butch-femme' as completely 'unnecessary' or 'negative' – in fact, these categories played an important part in the development of public lesbian identity formations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kraus 1996). I rather wish to determine how successful 'butch-femme' identity descriptions are in the contemporary setting of carnival and the public sphere in general.

within the heteronormative public sphere. The question that therefore needs to be asked is whether, with all the discursive baggage attached to these two terms, they can actually transgress the heteronormative order they so clearly replicate.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1.3.3.2: PERFORMING 'BUTCH-FEMME': CARNIVAL AND THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE PUBLIC SPHERE**

As discussed previously, the transformation of private homosexual intimacies into public demonstrations have for the most part been impeded by heteronormative regulation. This is also true for 'butch' and 'femme' identities which have been criticised by feminists and queer theorists alike for yielding to normative gender codes. I would argue that the normative restrictions that are imposed by the demand for 'liberating visibility' can be perceived in the public display of private homosexual intimacies or identities during carnival. 'Butch' and 'femme' are identity categories whose power and lack thereof hinge on their visibility as they are ascribed different levels of normative (dis)approval within the public sphere. Public discourses of 'butch' and 'femme' are granted different hierarchies by normative institutions – whether it is homonormative regulations (enforced by perceptions that 'butch' is the more 'authentic' gay identity) or heteronormative conventions (that place emphasis on degrees of 'abjection', where the heterosexual-looking 'femme' is less 'abnormal' than the confrontational 'butch'). These categories thus exemplify hegemonic processes that assign them different levels of visibility, power and normative approval.

Carnival is vital for determining the degree to which 'butch-femme' identities resist or yield to normative regulation. Actions and identities – ranging from those which are deemed 'inappropriate' or 'invisible' (and thus assigned to the concealment of the private sphere), to those which are stereotyped as 'authentic' or 'essentially visible' – are specifically displayed, mobilised and made public during carnival. Instead of presenting 'butch-femme' identities as representative of 'true selves', as descriptions of an 'essential', 'natural' identity, a more complex renegotiation of 'butch' and 'femme' is brought to the fore during carnival – specifically through role-play. 'Butch' and 'femme' – if not treated as essential identities, but rather as constructed and negotiated formations – can involve forms of "erotic play" (Case 1989: 298). A consciously *playful* (ironic, camp, self-critical) employment of 'butch' and 'femme' seems to be an effective counteraction against the normative restrictions that are discursively and spatially imposed on identity formations. Teresa De Lauretis asserts that:

Butch-femme role-playing is exciting not because it represents heterosexual desire, but because it doesn't; that is to say, in mimicking it, it shows the uncanny distance, like an effect of ghosting, between desire (heterosexually presented as it is) and the representation; and because the representation doesn't fit the actors who perform it, it only points to their investment in a fantasy (1994: 109-110).

The fantasy that is created by 'butch-femme' role-playing can act as a critical space from which normative gay regulation can be critiqued, as well as the heterosexual 'original' that is supposedly copied<sup>72</sup>. 'Butch' and 'femme' stereotypes, if critically played with, can be used to draw attention to the hegemonic structures that are invested in these terms – to the normative institutions that determined their values of power and their public visibility.

This play with 'butch-femme' markers of identity is evident during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* when certain visual imagery is employed by gay females to question 'butchness' and/or 'femmeness' as 'essential' characteristics. A participant of this parade – see Figure 13 – demonstrates this play with both 'butch' and 'femme' stereotypes. The participant plays with identity markers – she is not depicting herself as either 'butch' or 'femme', but using the platform of carnival as a spectacle to emphasise the performativity of both these qualities. She simultaneously uses both 'butch' and 'femme' identity cues, and thereby emphasises their polarisation in normative discourse by designating one side of her body to reveal 'butch' codes, and the other 'femme' ones. Attention is thus drawn to the inscription of polarised gender codes of male and female on the lesbian body. Within the context of this gender ambivalence, the poster, which reads "come out, come out, whoever you are", acquires interesting resonances. "Whoever you are" is not a simple thing to determine, her performance seems to suggest.

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<sup>72</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, Judith Butler suggests in this regard that 'butch' and 'femme' are performative constructions, as is all gender. By drawing attention to the "fiction of heterosexual coherence", Butler argues that 'butch' and 'femme' are imitations of heterosexuality, which in itself lacks any origin (1996: 185). Butler calls for a reconsideration of the "homophobic charge that queens and butches and femmes are imitations of the heterosexual real. Here 'imitation' carries the meaning of 'derivative' or 'secondary', a copy of an origin [heterosexuality] which is itself the ground of all copies, but which is itself a copy of nothing" (1996: 185).





**Figure 13.**  
Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2008).  
Digital Photograph.

This participant emphasises the heteronormative discourses that still pervade the visual language and corporeal expressions used by sexual minorities to show their dissent. On the one hand, the identities that are invited by this participant are unnamed, rendering her call open to any and to multiple identities to be configured within the public space. On the other hand, the visualisation – the specific polarisation of the male and female, the ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ – indicates the lack of counter discourses available to constitute a sense of sexual or gendered self within the public sphere. This example indicates how carnival is seen as a stage from which to invite people to ‘come out’ and showcase their identity in the public sphere. Yet the *Cape Town Pride Parade* indicates the paradoxes inherent to the simultaneous attempt *and failure* to reconstitute the marginalised sexual subject outside the discourses of normative institutions and hegemonic spaces.

#### **CHAPTER 4.1.4: THE PRIVATE AND THE PUBLIC CONCLUDED**

Separate spheres for private and public expressions of sexuality are simultaneously contested and constructed during carnival. In this subchapter, I investigated how physical, metaphorical and corporeal spaces are discursively constituted through notions of private and public expressions of identity. During carnival these spaces are highly ambiguous, to say the least. For example, the metaphorical space of the closet, when deconstructed and brought into contact with carnival, was revealed as an 'in-between' space that defied 'inside/out' dualisms. The notion of an 'essentially visible', 'out', and 'public' gay identity was explored as it was simultaneously endorsed *and* contested during carnival. Corporeal spaces, when drawing on the Bakhtinian notion of the transgressive 'material body', also appear to be highly contradictory. This subchapter thus revealed that boundaries of 'respectability', 'morality' and 'normality' that separate the private and the public spheres are simultaneously erected and transgressed during carnival.

#### **CHAPTER 4.2: MOVEMENT AND STASIS: THE REALMS OF THE SPECTATOR AND THE PARTICIPANT**

The reciprocal relationship between space and identity during carnival can be traced to the mobilisation of certain visual elements that play a fundamental part in the formulation of a sense of self; whether as an individual or as a group. Carnavalesque identities are based on certain perceived similarities that are shared by the highly diverse participants of carnival; such as alternative sexuality in the case of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. Similarities can be used to create temporary coherency amongst the diverse participants. These similarities are, however, not only mobilised in accordance with the communal desires of the participants, but also in relation (or in opposition) to another significant group – the spectators.

The bystanders of carnival are as diverse in their makeup as the participants and can therefore not be categorised as either harsh opponents or proud supporters of gay/queer identities. The spectator plays an important role in the formulation of carnivalesque identity – whether as a supporter or an opponent of the identities performed during carnival, the spectator's presence is crucial for the participant's presentation of 'self'. Carnival is, after all, a form of spectacle that is geared towards the presentation of identity towards a certain audience. In the case of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, the participants perform various sexual

identities that not only signify particular subcultural affiliations to other participants, but also act as cues for recognition or reaction from the spectators.

For certain theorists, such as Bakhtin, the all encompassing nature of carnival is strong enough to dissolve the boundaries between spectators and participants. Bakhtin argues that festival activities have the capacity to engage and absorb all who find themselves in contact with it – *everyone* is a participant of carnival:

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all people. While carnival lasts, there is no life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom (Bakhtin 1968: 7).

According to Bakhtin, the participants assembled on “carnival square” are a “body of people...aware of their unity in time” (1968: 255-256). This sentiment is also echoed in the work of Edith and Victor Turner (1978), who argue that carnivals produce a sense of “*communitas*”, a feeling of camaraderie, amongst all those who form part of its activities. This feeling is apparently so strong that most status distinctions are erased, and the realms of spectator and participant are suspended. Roy Rappaport also emphasises a sense of carnivalesque “fusion” where both those who are witnessing and those who are acting out in carnival are participants, and a psychological state is consequently manifested in which the “hidden oneness” of all is revealed (1999: 381).

For certain critics the actual embodiment of carnival does not necessarily live up to the ideals of a boundary-free state of ‘oneness’ experienced by all, and carnival is not really powerful enough to extend its inversion of normative order to witnesses whose moral values or political opinions are at variance to those personified by carnival. For example, Lindahl (1996: 61) suggests that, contrary to certain idealistic views, carnival is made up of opposing realms of spectatorship and participance, of the ‘actor’ and the ‘acted upon’, and geographic and ideological boundaries between these fields prevail during many carnivals. With carnival often treated (by both its supporters and detractors) as the “culture of the other” which is mobilised against the “social hierarchy of bourgeois society” (Stallybrass & White 1993: 290-291), the participants are seen as the visual and corporeal ‘other’ of spectatorship and the dominant culture that it stands for. This notion has promoted a binary conception of carnival as

those who act and those who watch; those who question normative order by participating in carnival and those who endorse its stronghold in society by not participating. These two polarised realms of the participant and the spectator are visually recognisable during carnival as the temporary 'activeness' of the participants roaming the streets are played off against the spectators as the 'passive' and 'static' witnesses of carnival.

Carnival is often treated as an activity that is primarily used by marginalised people to temporarily express themselves within the public domain of the empowered. During carnival, marginalised (sub)cultures are granted the space to perform their identity to a watching public. The hierarchic relationship that exists between the marginalised participants and the empowered spectators are consequently visualised in carnival. According to Awam Amkpa, spectatorship draws attention to carnival as a "tourist experience whereby their [the spectator's] panoptic gaze confirms their identities and superiority in economic, ethnic, and, most of all, gendered terms" (1999: 102). In addition, warns Amkpa, invitations by city councils to perform carnivalesque identities can be a hegemonic concession that is rationalised by normative institutions in order to include the marginalised into a "formulaic multiculturalism" (Amkpa 1999: 97).<sup>73</sup>

Such invitations can perpetuate binary structures of centre and periphery by creating a spectacle for a watching public to gaze upon. These invitations are thus not really indicative of acceptance of diversity and hybridity, but rather of a structure of singularity and centeredness from which marginalised groups are excluded. Milla Riggio (2004) and Robert Young (1995) are also of the opinion that the carnivalesque appropriation of city space is to some extent limited by the dominant normative institutions that remind the participants of their intrusion into a territory not their own. According to Riggio, the division between the participants of carnival who actively 'parade' through the streets and the static, watching public, reduces or alters the impact of the event as "the 'parade' may own the streets for a time, but always with the awareness that this is either by permission or, conversely, in a hostile environment" (2004: 25). Similarly, Robert Young argues that "today's self-proclaimed mobile

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<sup>73</sup> Amkpa is specifically concerned with Britain's relationship with its postcolonial subjects. This situation bears significant resemblance to South Africa where the latter also has marginalised subjects who had to renegotiate their relationship with former imperial institutions within a postcolonial era. I therefore find her analysis of the role that carnival plays within the British context pertinent and very applicable to my own investigation of carnival in the local context.

and multiple identities may be a marker not of contemporary social fluidity...but of a new stability, self assurance and quietism" (1995: 4). The multiplicity and marginality of the participants are often set up against the supposed singularity of the spectators from which they are at variance.

Marginality can, however, be utilised by marginalised groups to highlight the problematic demarcation of centre and periphery. By visually articulating marginality during carnival, the limits of the dominant culture are laid bare – that which carnival *is not* during its enactment, is read as signs of dominant culture. Those people who do not wish to perform during carnival, those who gaze upon the marginalised, are perceived as representatives of the very normative order that is contested through carnivalesque enactments of opposition. In this regard, Amkpa suggests that:

Marginality is displayed and beautified [through carnival] like a festering sore of the tropes of domination...Secondariness is performed as primariness and conventions of representations and enunciating subjecthood are performed as heteroglossia, spectacularly presented through masks, dance, and music. 'Otherness' is fetishised by performance and spectatorship, while gazes that are countertextual and signify limits of the dominant culture dominate the performances (1999: 103).

Carnival therefore seems to represent a complex system of hegemonic relations through which power is simultaneously exerted by those who gaze upon carnival's enactment and questioned by those who perform. Yet, the extent to which the binary construction of participance and spectatorship is enacted during carnival, needs to be determined. In the following sections I discuss various forms of identity enactments during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* in order to show how the differences between spectators and performers are simultaneously affirmed and questioned, and boundaries are concurrently visualised and blurred. I investigate whether carnival's visual enactment is a mere reinforcement of separate spheres of spectatorship and participance, or whether this polarised delineation is contested in the display of carnivalesque identity.

## CHAPTER 4.2.1: CARNIVAL AND THE SIMULTANEOUS AFFIRMATION AND NEGATION OF DIFFERENCE

Carnavalesque delineations of spectatorship and participation have hegemonic implications insofar as different values of autonomy and discursive centrality are attached to these realms. The marginalisation of gay/queer sexuality is brought to the fore during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* in order to visually articulate a lack of sexual agency. However, it is not only a lack of agency that is visualised, but it is also the reclamation of sexual 'decency' that is often enacted. The spectators are the target audience of these performances – they come to represent the hegemonic and normative institutions towards which a critique of oppression and the censoring of gay/queer identities are geared.

Acts of critique and even violence that occur between the participants and the spectators can be seen during *Pride Parades*. These parades are characterised by opposition from certain spectators, and even by forms of conflict that erupt between spectators and participants (Gevisser & Reid 1994: 280). Religious opposition by Christian spectators are some of the most prevalent forms of confrontation – see Figure 14.



**Figure 14.**

Anonymous, *Untitled* (1992).

Photograph. (De Waal & Manion 2006).

With banners warning 'sodomites' that they have to 'turn or burn', these spectators solidify the 'moral' boundary between spectators and participants. By invoking images of eternal damnation and the fires of hell, their placards and presence serve as warnings to the 'sexually deviant' of their 'wrong' deeds, and as emphasis of the centre from which the participants are

supposedly 'deviating'. This act of opposition is not limited to the spectators – the participants of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* also exhibit their resistance to and reclamation of certain social, cultural and particularly religious systems of power. During the participants' mobilisation of identity, their visual display of dissent is predominantly conveyed through signs and symbols. These visual signifiers, which serve "the crucial purpose of rendering visible [queer] communities that have been erased or marginalised" (Rapp 2003), are often renegotiations of the very iconography used by normative society and opposing spectators. Certain participants thus render visible their dissent by inverting and reapplying the symbols used by spectators who oppose carnivalesque identities.

Carnavalesque acts of inversion are clearly visible in the appropriation of religious iconography. Symbolic inversions of Christian symbols during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* draw on the religious and anti-gay marches that had been held in the past to oppose the agency, freedom and religious autonomy of the lgbt subcultures. Figures 15 and 16 show the extent to which certain religious elements, such as robes<sup>74</sup> and the symbols of the cross and the Chi-Rho<sup>75</sup>, are combined with iconography associated with lgbt subcultures, such as the 'gay flag'.<sup>76</sup> By brandishing certain Christian symbols during their march through the city, and by recontextualising these symbols (through the combination of elements associated with Christianity and gay identity), these participants challenge the marginalised status that religion has historically ascribed to lgbt identities.

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<sup>74</sup> According to Christian doctrine, the robe is an external symbol of spiritual purity and potency that acts as a sign of the 'inherent' Christian nature of its wearer (*The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* 1996. Sv 'Robe'). Whereas the robe (like the religious habit) indicates some form of religious authority over its wearer's body (*The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols* 1996. Sv 'Robe'), I would argue that the renegotiation of the robe in rainbow colours represents an important shift in articulating gayness as the religious censure of the gay body and identity is denied through the *bricolage* of divergent sexual, cultural and religious codes..

<sup>75</sup> The Chi-Rho, an early crucifixion symbol used by Christians, was formed by superimposing the first two Greek letters in the name of Christ, 'chi' (ρ) and 'rho' (χ) (Biedermann 1992: 66), which can be seen in the flag used in Figure 15. The Chi-Rho has been a symbol of Christianity since the reign of Constantine I, and has frequently been used on church banners and flags.

<sup>76</sup> The 'gay flag', a prominent symbol of gay and lesbian rights, was created by American artist Gilbert Baker in 1978, and has ever since been used to celebrate gay pride (Anderson 1993: 25). This flag, consisting of eight horizontal stripes in fuchsia, red, orange, yellow, green, turquoise, indigo, and violet, was created to represent the "sex, life, healing, sunlight, nature, magic, harmony and spirit" of lgbt people (Anderson 1993: 25), and this flag has become a symbol for lgbt liberty and mobility. The use of the 'gay flag' can thus be seen as a way for participants to show their allegiance to lgbt identities worldwide.



**Figure 15.**

Anonymous, *Untitled* (2005).

Digital Photograph. (Cape Town Pride. 2005).



**Figure 16.**

Anonymous, *Untitled* (2005).

Digital Photograph. (Cape Town Pride. 2005).

It is important to note that these participants are Christians, and that their appropriation of religious symbolism is not necessarily a form of parody. Using a range of medieval and contemporary symbols as signifiers of 'authentic' religion, their defiant performances rather counter the silencing of the religious gay voice. The participants' march through the city and the costumes that they wear are made to signify the autonomy of religious lgbt movements. Through the combination of lgbt and Christian symbols, sexuality and religion are combined to form hybrid structures of identification through which the incompatibility of religion and homosexuality is visually countered. This display is at once a mobilisation of difference and similarities – some of the participants and spectators may share the same religion, yet they differ in terms of their interpretation of the sexualities endorsed by it.



## CHAPTER 4.2.2: CARNIVAL AND THE BLURRING OF BOUNDARIES

### CHAPTER 4.2.2.1: SPECTATORS BECOMING THE SPECTACLE

The visual and ideological boundaries between participants and spectators are not absolute or irrefutable, and can be crossed and blurred due to carnival's transgressive nature. Religious imagery and identities can for instance be mobilised to highlight the difference between the discursively marginalised participants and centred spectators, yet it can also be used to draw on the similarities between the groups. Religious iconography can thus highlight the carnivalesque character that is embedded in both the spectators' and the participants' identities.

Protesting spectators often utilise religious iconography to emphasise their distance from the identities performed by the participants and the discourses produced by carnival as a whole. In the case of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, the religious protestors visually set themselves in opposition to the 'deviant' sexual identities that are performed during and condoned by carnival. Yet, through their very presence they are saturated within the carnivalesque discourses that circulate this event, and they are not immune to carnival's influence. Some protesters are 'expected' to be present by many spectators and participants alike. Mark Gevisser and Graeme Reid argues that "Bible-punching" religious protestors "have become as much part of the spectacle as the drag queens" and that their presence, though somewhat menacing, is critical since it has the capacity to transform a *Pride Parade* from "a rather quiet stroll into a vigorous outrage" (1994: 280-281). Not only do these spectators draw attention to the march (thus facilitating public visibility), but the protest, outrage, and even violence that erupts from these spectators' mere presence at the *Pride Parades* actually emphasise their own carnivalesque character.

The spectator as protestor is therefore an important identity that is in effect constructed during carnival. See for instance Figure 17, a photograph of a protestor who has been present at the *Cape Town Pride Parade* for at least the last three years.



**Figure 17.**  
Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2007).  
Digital Photograph.

This specific protestor has become a standard feature of this parade, drawing spectators and participants alike to congregate around him. Being ritualised in the *Cape Town Pride Parade* scene, he is a focal point where multiple identities converge. Some spectators show their support for this protestor, joining him in his calls for ‘sex perverts’ to redeem themselves, while participants utilise his presence to perform their dissent and opposition to the religious discourses that he represents. Even though he clearly dissociates himself from the ‘sexually deviant’ participants of this carnival, he has actually been converted into an object of spectacle that is gazed at (and photographed) by other spectators and participants. ‘Queens’ and ‘dykes’ temporarily take the backseat as photographers and spectators fix their gaze on the ‘exotic’ appeal of a ‘real’ figure of opposition – this solitary spokesperson for the ‘righteous’. One of his main carnivalesque appeals is his temporary status as a minority. Even though the religious condemnation that he preaches and the normative opposition that he represents are part of the sentiments of a large group of South Africans, he is the only active figure during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* to perform his dissent. The hegemonic discourses that he embodies, although still found in the minds and attitudes of mainstream society, are

limited in their enactment during carnival. He may represent the beliefs of a majority, yet he is rendered a minority during carnival; he is one figure of resistance during an event that is in effect ruled by 'sexually perverse' lgbt identities.

His singularity is his appeal, for he is rendered a caricature of hegemonic power and religious intolerance by carnival. In the same way that hundreds of lgbt participants perform their identities of dissent to the spectators, this solitary protestor performs his own minority identity to the participants. Even though the religious discourses that he presents are pitted against carnivalesque discourses, his visual performance of identity renders him a spectacle of carnival and he is transformed into a carnivalesque sight of 'otherness' by the very carnival that he opposes. Against hordes of performing participants, he is temporarily the anomaly of carnival, the 'exotic other' that stands out and calls for attention within the spectacle of the *Cape Town Pride Parade*. Ironically, the clear boundary that is intentionally erected by this protestor between himself and the participants is erased by his very presence and appearance. To all intents and purposes he becomes a carnivalesque sight that can be gazed at: the spectator thus becomes the spectacle.

#### **CHAPTER 4.2.2.2: SPECTATORS BECOMING PARTICIPANTS**

The disintegration of clearly demarcated spheres of spectatorship and participation can further be seen in certain overlapping qualities that are visually manifested during carnival. During the *Cape Town Pride Parade* certain visual signs, which would usually be perceived as part of normative authority and the domain of the spectator, are reemployed by participants to stress the legitimacy of their mobilised identities. This is evident in the utilisation of certain authoritative identity icons, such as policemen.

#### **CHAPTER 4.2.2.2.1: SPECTATORS, SURVEILLANCE, AND THE CONCEPT OF 'POLICE'**

The notion of 'police' is often treated as synonymous for normative power. For Foucault, 'police' as a concept is intricately tied with disciplinary techniques and normalising practices. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979), Foucault investigates the practice of disciplinary punishment through which 'professionals', such as the police, exerted considerable

power over the members of modern society.<sup>77</sup> Foucault describes 'police' as a collection of devices that are employed to ensure the 'public good':

The sum of means which need to be put into practice in order to ensure the 'public good' in a way which goes beyond the maintenance of peace and good order is, in general terms...called the 'police'... The police extend their domain beyond that of surveillance and the maintenance of order... It can be seen that the police force is the whole management of the social body" (Foucault, quoted in Barret-Kriegel 1992: 194).

Drawing on Foucault's formulation of disciplinary punishment, Mark Neocleous (2000) argues that the police play a fundamental part in the fabrication of social order. Neocleous relates the role of the police to the regulation of civil society: "[the] noun, verb and adjective 'police' was historically used to describe the way order was achieved, and part of the argument here is to suggest that it is through policing that the state shapes and orders civil society" (2000: xi). According to Neocleous, the ordering of society through the police endorses bourgeois ideas of 'sovereignty' and 'consensus' since the discourse of policing is concerned with creating order within the social body (2000: x-xi).<sup>78</sup> The police's role is thus to conceal the profound insecurities of society by containing or eradicating social 'disorder' and 'ills' – an issue that continually arises in both Foucault's and Neocleous's definitions of police. Both these authors acknowledge the police's role in governing the social body as they scrutinise modern society for signs of 'deviance'. The policing of the social body rests on a binary conception of society as comprising of 'normal' and 'deviant' members that need to be separated from one another. The police are accordingly established as the 'guardians' of normative order who create security by disciplining 'immorality' and 'depravity'.

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<sup>77</sup> In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault investigates the development of instruments of control and discipline in the West by tracing the influence of discourses of power and knowledge on institutions of penal reform. According to Dany Lacombe, Foucault's groundbreaking work rewrote the history of penal reform by acknowledging "a new mode of 'disciplinary power', a power exercised through techniques of objectification, classification and normalisation, a power deployed through the whole social body" (1996: 332).

<sup>78</sup> Neocleous argues in this regard that: "The whole police system is geared towards 'consensus' – the ideological precondition of bourgeois society – while denying the fact that by definition such consensus cannot exist ... the preoccupation with 'disorder' serves a specific ideological function which masks over the hierarchical nature of order" (Neocleous 2000: 114).

Within the South African context, Foucault and Neocleous's definitions are apt as the police here are notorious for their bureaucratic, politically committed entrenchment of systems of 'order'. This was especially true during the apartheid era when black South Africans, the majority of the South African population, "were seen not so much as a community to be served as an enemy to be countered" (Cawthra 1993: 17).<sup>79</sup> It was also during this timeframe that the police, as the 'official' enforcers of apartheid legislation, targeted homosexuals as 'social deviants' that had to be controlled in order to protect the heteronormative social body.<sup>80</sup> The persecution of homosexuals during apartheid led to the "well-established sub-cultural fear and anger towards legal authorities", particularly the police (Isaacs & McKendrick 1992: 152). The police's role as guardians of the 'social security' and 'moral righteousness' during apartheid South Africa contributed largely to their contemporary image as wielders of normative power and enforcers of severe restrictions. In this manner they were constituted as the opposition of lgbt sexualities, and this image is still present in the palimpsest of South African sexuality.

#### **CHAPTER 4.2.2.2: CARNIVALESQUE DISRUPTIONS OF SPECTATORSHIP AND POLICING**

Police are often read as the embodiment of hegemonic power and normative institutions, and homosexual policing during apartheid tied them in queer consciousness to heteronormative domination. They are thus intricately tied to the very normative institutions that the *Cape Town Pride Parade* opposes and strives to transgress. Yet, the image of the police is conspicuous during carnival activities – even though they are still seen as the symbolic opponents of what carnival represent, their presence is actually required to allow carnival to temporarily claim

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<sup>79</sup> In his investigation of policing in South Africa, Gavin Cawthra (1993) traces the general perception of the South African Police since its official inception in 1909 from a colonial, frontier-style police force, to the official machine that implemented apartheid's discriminatory laws. Cawthra argues that, during apartheid, the police raids on what was primarily seen as 'enemy territory' (ranging from townships to gay cruising sites) to demonstrate their power and to enforce regulations, led to a largely antagonistic view of the police by the majority population within South Africa (1993: 9). In apartheid South Africa, the police were regarded as the enemies of democracy and liberty, as symbols of oppression and violence – an image that often lingers in contemporary society.

<sup>80</sup> One of South Africa's most bizarre anti-gay laws (the *Immorality Act* of 1966) was passed after a police raid on a gay party in a suburb of Johannesburg. This *Immorality Act*, with the infamous 'Three Men at a Party Clause', criminalised any "male person who commits with another male person at a party [any occasion where more than two persons were present] any act which is calculated to stimulate sexual passion or give sexual gratification" (cited in *Constitutional Court of South Africa: Gay and Lesbian Rights* 2005). See Chapter 3 for more detail on specific legislation that the police enforced on lgbt people, and the particular effects that it had on spatial expressions of sexual identity within the Cape Town area.

the city streets (an issue that I touched on in Chapter 2). Primarily fulfilling the role of guardians to enforce public security, the police guide the participants of carnival through the streets of Cape Town. They steer them through the normative structures of city, and the police's commanding presence essentially signifies the boundary between the participants and the gazes of the spectators. They conduct and contain carnival, clothe it in their officialdom, without necessarily endorsing it or identifying with the carnivalesque identities performed. They 'allow' carnival to happen; they tolerate its temporary presence without participating in its disruptive formations. They lead it and gaze onto it, rather than act within it.

Yet, carnival has a way of creeping into the most obstinate identity constructions and laying bare its excesses – revealing it to be capable of more than was initially considered. During the 2007 *Cape Town Pride Parade* the carnival was headed by policemen who, as with almost all of the parades, guide the participants through the streets of Cape Town. Yet, during this event one of the participants dressed up in his own 'official' uniform, quite similar to the garb chosen by the police, and drove alongside the 'real' constabulary with little visible difference between them – see the participant at the back of the procession in Figure 18. Wearing the same clothes, badges and insignia associated with the police force, the participant appears as one of the 'official' figures, one of the 'legitimate' disciplinarians. He *performs* and *participates* in the role of a police officer, and he is temporarily indistinguishable from the 'real' police, the 'original' law enforcing body.



**Figure 18.**  
Ernst van der Wal,  
*Untitled* (2008).  
Digital Photograph.

The 'legality' of the police and normative society at large is parodied in this erotic play with the symbols of officialdom. This 'policeman' acts as a double agent by participating in transgressive carnival and mimicking the police and their 'official' duty of normative regulation. The police force – as a separate, authoritative sphere that is generally located outside carnival's transgressive structures – is brought into play by this participant. In this visual performance, the symbolic value of 'police' is harnessed by this participant who performs his transgression of the normative boundaries that separate the marginalised from the centred, the 'deviant' from the 'normal', and the participant from the spectator. The role of the police can thus be mimicked and renegotiated during carnival in order to blur the boundaries between spectators and participants, and to stress the carnivalesque transgression of social order and its vanguards.

#### **CHAPTER 4.2.3: THE REALMS OF THE SPECTATOR AND PARTICIPANT CONCLUDED**

The boundaries between spectatorship and participation are thus pushed to the limits, and often transgressed. So to some extent, Bakhtin's notion of the all encompassing nature of carnival that is strong enough to dissolve the boundary between spectator and participant is applicable to contemporary carnival. The *Cape Town Pride Parade* has the capacity to transform the category of spectatorship by rendering the onlookers of carnival both participants and spectacles. Yet, carnival is also employed to show the limits of dominant culture, and can be a visual reminder of the marginalisation of sexual minorities. While it can transgress normative institutions by mimicking or reemploying its structures and symbols, it can also be a mere 'hegemonic concession' through which participants are 'allowed' to perform, transgress and tease. The contravention of boundaries separating the marginalised from the normative may seem victorious, yet the opposite may also be true: the carnivalesque contestations of official order may be 'endorsed aberrations' that, since they are temporary in nature, are given the hegemonic nod of approval as they do not present a long-term threat to normative society. In fact, it can be argued that the participants' performed alterity serves to bolster and strengthen the 'sameness' of the heteronormative.

## CHAPTER 4.3: GLOBAL GAY SPACE AND THE RISE OF THE HOMONORMATIVE

The opening up of the discursive space of South African identities and sexualities after the fall of apartheid, has (inter alia) led to an increase in sex consumerism and an awareness of the pleasures of consumption (Van Zyl 2005b: 20). The urge to consume sexuality and its products, which is often treated as a growing global phenomenon in contemporary discourse, can now be traced in local narrations of sexuality. Yet, sexuality and its embodiment in contemporary South Africa is shaped by complex and ambiguous processes. Lgbt identities, which have largely been ignored or erased from public images and texts in apartheid South Africa, are increasingly investigated for lingering traces of a concealed or ignored African and/or South African heritage. At the same time, as gayness/queerness is targeted by global commodity cultures, people are increasingly urged to 'consume' certain discourses and products, all claiming to be prerequisites for 'authentic' expressions of gay identity. In this chapter I will explore these and other issues that pertain to gay/queer identities that are performed during the *Cape Town Pride Parade*.

### CHAPTER 4.3.1: GAY COMMODITY CULTURE

*'Gay' is becoming a warmer if not a hot commodity...[as] gays are included in an elastic community of pleasure seekers and a tentatively more pliant heterosexual sex/gender system (Hennessy 1995: 168-169).*

In this chapter I investigate the effect of global commodity culture on local gay/queer embodiments. Global structures of commodification have tremendous bearing on the local narration of sexual identity as discourses of consumption are increasingly directed to gay markets.<sup>81</sup> In contemporary Western society, gay consumers are increasingly targeted and hence tolerated as a lucrative market (Hennessy 1995: 172). The apparent tolerance of sexual diversity in global markets has led to the development of gay culture as a niche market

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<sup>81</sup> Members of the gay market are also referred to as 'DINKs' (double income, no kids) who have higher disposable incomes and the freedom to travel more often (*The History of Pride* 2008). 'DINKs' are developing globally as a primary target market consisting of "trend-setting, astute and often affluent consumers" (*The History of Pride* 2008); a tendency that is often interpreted as an acceptance of gay lifestyles.



and a distinctive capitalist class<sup>82</sup> that can be commercially exploited (Joseph 2002: 71). As gay consumers are identified as a market with specific products and services directed exclusively at them (Rand 2002), gay identity is increasingly narrated in terms of its power to consume. In this manner, gay visibility is amplified in the public sphere and the media.

For Erica Rand, this exposure can be positive as it provides gay people with “the pleasure of seeing oneself mirrored in culture” (2002). Rand argues that, “in a world where sexual minorities are often hidden from view, the visibility created by advertising that represents or targets them contributes productively to glbq [gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer] visibility in general” (2002). David Skover and Kellye Testy also maintains that, as “LesBiGays are famished for the recognition and acceptance of citizen-consumers...having a commodified identity...[can] mean feeling ‘wanted’ and socially ‘validated’” (2002: 242).

However, Michael Piore suggests that identifying gays only as consumers severely restricts their representation (1997: 505). Even though the intensified circulation of gay images may seem to be indicative of a growing acceptance of homosexuality, capitalism’s appropriation of gayness can be a ‘limited victory’ for gays who are primarily visualised as consumer subjects, rather than social subjects (Clark 1991: 192). For some critics (Evans 1993; Rand 2002; Warner 1993) the conflation of gayness and consumer culture poses an ‘ethical’ threat to gay identity. Erica Rand argues, for example, that some critics of consumerism are fearful that decadence and materialism are becoming the basis of gay identity and that this ‘cheapens’ gayness by converting it into a mere lifestyle that can be “adopted and discarded like the latest fashion” (2002). For David Evans, it is evident that sexual minorities that are usually treated as ‘moral aliens’ within hegemonic society, are only tolerated as citizens as they

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<sup>82</sup> The rise of the gay subculture as a capitalist class is traced by historian John D’Emilio (1983) to the development of industrial capitalism from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward. D’Emilio argues that the expansion of capital and the rise of wage labour radically transformed the structure and function of family life, and the meaning of heterosexual and homosexual relations (1983: 2, 469). D’Emilio explains that “only when individuals began to make their living through wage labour, instead of as parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity – an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family” (1983: 104-105). As capital spread and consumer goods became more socialised, sexuality was released from the ‘imperative’ of procreation, and became a form of erotic pleasure (D’Emilio 1983). D’Emilio thus asserts that the separation between sexual pleasure and procreation brought about by capitalist consumerism, led to homosexuality and heterosexuality both being ‘invented’ as sites of pleasure. Wage labour facilitated an “escape route from heterosexual family life” (Gluckman & Reed 1997: xiii) and, with sexuality transformed from natal reproduction to forms of social and economic production, homosexuality came to be established in terms of commodity culture.

consume the sexual and sexualised commodities marketed specifically for them (1993: 2). Accordingly, contemporary gay culture is particularly criticised for submitting to consumerism and mass-culture and, as Michael Warner argues, gayness is so intricately tied up with capitalism, that urban gays “reek of the commodity...we give off the smell of capitalism in rut” (1993: 17).

As the visibility of gay identity is intricately linked to its value in commodity culture, the gay market is increasingly presented in the global arena as a ‘universal community’ of consumers. To some extent, this process can be ascribed to the rapid globalisation of lifestyle and identity politics which led to the expansion of Western identity categories (Altman 1996: 77). ‘Global gay’ subjects are conceptualised in terms of their engagement in universal discourses, and the validity of gay identity is narrated in terms of subjects’ willingness to define themselves socially, commercially and politically in the ‘gay world’ (Altman 1996: 77, 84). This ‘gay world’ is represented as an economic, metaphorical and ideological space that is globally manifested in countries that have access to Western discourses. These ‘global’ expressions of identity are determined by ‘universal’ acts of purchase and consumer rights (Evans 1993: 5). It is thus understandable that some gay men and women are concerned that commodification threatens their identity status.<sup>83</sup>

Even though the commodification of gay identity may be problematic insofar as it reduces this identity to consumption, a far bigger problem, to my mind, is the exclusion and privilege that processes of identity consumption may entail. For, if gayness is sold, who can afford to consume this identity, and in which currency does it trade? The imagination and embodiment of ‘global’, consumable gayness is problematic in its assumption that everyone, everywhere has the means (and the desire) to buy into the discourses associated with Western gay identity.

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<sup>83</sup> The loss of identity in the face of consumerism is a much debated topic, with some voicing their concern that processes of consumption can lead to the disempowerment of the individual. One such critic is Bernard Stiegler who argues that the fluctuating production and circulation of value (in a contemporary, hyperindustrial society) leads to consumers being “devalued”, “devalorised” and “disindividuated” (2006). By using the metaphor of the hypermarket, Stiegler argues that consumerism compels all identities to derive value and meaning through participation in capitalist processes. Other theorists, such as Ann Pellegrini, are very critical of the contemporary obsession with ‘unmarked’, consumerist-free (gay) identities, and argues that, instead of nostalgically yearning for identities that are ‘unsoiled’ by commodity capitalism, critics should rather acknowledge that all identities (be it gay or straight) are in some way ‘marked’ by capitalism (2002: 141). Similarly, David Skover and Kellye Testy argues that gay identities have, throughout their development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, been commercially constructed, and that gays “can struggle to resist or reform their commodified identity, [yet] they cannot naively pretend that it is not there or merely insist that it is not ‘them’” (2002: 254).

The danger of consuming a 'global gay' identity is that it could lead to homonormative prescriptions of what gayness should look like. These globalised narrations of gayness can act as self-disciplining regimes that determine the look and feel of gay bodies and identities in countries that have access to Western discourses, and inevitably lead to the radical exclusion of non-commodified gay identities.

Commodified gay identity can also act as a barrier which determines who is allowed to consume 'global gayness'. Gay identity is particularly stratified along class, race and gender lines, and a gay consumer identity can "exclude, and render invisible, people who struggle economically, a process that disproportionately marginalises lgbtq [lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, queer] people who are of colour and/or female, since institutional sexism and racism affect economic status" (Rand 2002). Consumerism accordingly serves as a "disciplinary regime of sexuality" that helps "to generate and affirm middle-class identity" (Pellegrini 2002: 140), while it "participates in a long history of class-regulated visibility" (Hennessy 1995: 172).<sup>84</sup> The Western romantic myth of 'global gayness' problematically ignores the "hierarchies of wealth, education, and age" (Altman 1996: 89).

The 'global gay' is thus often imagined as white, middle-class, urban and male, and (to a lesser extent) female (Altman 1996; Johnson 2004; Skover & Testy 2002).<sup>85</sup> Narrations of the 'global gay' also favour white maleness in its discursive formations.<sup>86</sup> In South Africa, where

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<sup>84</sup> Rosemary Hennessy argues that the commodification of gay styles and identities in corporate and academic spaces, perpetuates the notion of gay as an essentially bourgeois leisure activity (1995: 172-173). In doing so, gay identities often participate in class-regulated admissions of visibility, favouring the middle-class gay consumer and blotting from view gays who are unemployed or poor (Hennessy 1995: 176).

<sup>85</sup> Altman, Johnson, as well as Skover and Testy maintain that gay identity is stratified through discursive practices among social class, income, race, disability and sexual preference. Johnson argues that the ideal gay subject is recounted in global discourses as white, bourgeois citizens; "they are coupled, monogamous in their sexual relations, even formally partnered or married as changes in local law permit. Partners are approximate social equals in terms of their age, income, class, and occupational status. The gender identity and sexual object-choice of each partner is to remain consistent, meaning that bisexual and transgendered persons are perforce excluded from this matrix. Sexual relations between partners are supposed to be non-coercive, reciprocal, and loving" (Johnson 2004). Altman claims that, in the imagining of a 'global gay', "he – sometimes, though less often, she – is conceptualised in terms very much derived from recent American fashion and intellectual style...with an interest in both activism and fashion (1996: 77). Skover and Testy maintain that the formulation of gay identity as a commercial market comprising of upper-class Caucasians, creates a socioeconomic and ideological gap between the divergent people who identify as gay (2002: 224).

<sup>86</sup> According to Jasbir Puar, 'coloured' gay women are still marginalised in contemporary societies as they are only visible at the peripheries of gay culture and spaces (2002). Puar argues that white gay capital replicates

economic and discursive empowerment have for a very long time been synonymous for white identity, the traces of old hierarchies are still visible in the sexual palimpsest of contemporary society. The ability to consume gayness is thus privileged in terms of class, income, race, and gender.

In the following sections, I investigate these problematic issues by charting how narrations of 'global gayness' lead to the establishment of homonormative spaces and practices in Cape Town. I demonstrate how the consumption of gayness is not a democratic process and how white men are still favoured in both global and local discourses. I use Cape Town as an example of how universal assumptions of gayness are spatially manifested; not only in physical city spaces (such as Cape Town's own 'Gay Village') but also in media spaces (such as the gay press). I also explore carnival as an ambiguous force that brings heterogeneity into the commodified, exclusionary spaces of 'global gayness'.

#### **CHAPTER 4.3.1.1: CITY SPACE AND THE 'GAY VILLAGE'**

With cities increasingly marketed as places of leisure consumption, urban spaces are often shaped by the desires of various identities and sexualities. Not only is identity physically embodied in the space of the city, but the city can also be marketed as a space of identity consumption (Lees 2002: 389). Cities can act as commodities to the extent that they are often 'sold' to both local and global markets in terms of certain values (such as pleasure, sexual freedom, gay friendliness, etc) that make them more consumable. Cape Town is one such city that is often marketed to gay consumers as a space of sexual leisure<sup>87</sup>, as the 'Queer Capital' or 'gay Mecca' of Africa where gays can come to play – see Figure 19. By presenting Cape Town as a city that is tolerant and even welcoming of different sexualities, the press plays a fundamental part in branding this city as a space of gay consumption (*Die Burger* 1998; *The Mail and Guardian* 1999; *Gay Pages* 2003).

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heterosexual systems of oppression, and that gay women, gays of colour, and postcolonial lesbians and gays are implicated in exclusionary capitalist processes (2002: 945). Female same-sex desire is, specifically in the South African context, far less prevalent, and, as Theo Sonnekus maintains, it is either "completely omitted or totally outweighed by the sheer mass of male imagery" (2007: 53). White phallogentrism is thus still enacted in contemporary gay institutions – a phenomenon that David Butz and Michael Ripmeester ascribe to the way in which marginalised peoples often reemploy the very power structures that they are trying to escape (1999).

<sup>87</sup> Cape Town has a long history of gay culture and has been known as one of the most accessible cities in terms of gay bars, cruising areas, etc. – see Gevisser and Cameron (1994) for an in-depth analysis of this phenomenon.



**Figure 19.**  
*Pink South Africa* (2008).  
 Website layout. (*Pink South Africa*. 2008).

Cape Town is conceived as a safe-haven for its own gay inhabitants, with specifically the De Waterkant area (also called the ‘Gay Village’) as a space that is accepting of gay behaviour. This area is not only perceived as the centre of gay leisure consumption by its Cape Townian residents, but it is even marketed as such to ‘global gay’ tourists in international media. The ‘Gay Village’ is established and promoted as the ‘safe’ place in Cape Town to have a gay holiday. However, the construction of the ‘Gay Village’s’ ‘safeness’ as a gay tourist destination reveals certain problematic assumptions of what form the protection of gay identity should take. The narration of ‘safeness’ in global and local consumer cultures perpetuate certain hierarchies and stereotypes with regards to the demarcation of space. The ‘Gay Village’ is most prominently marketed as a ‘homogenous’, ‘sanitised’ gay male leisure space to a (global) gay market (Visser 2003: 136). The safeness of the ‘Gay Village’ is formulated in terms of its relative freedom from homophobia, but specifically its relative freedom from crime. This is supposedly grounded on the ‘fact’ that it is a generally white and therefore more ‘up-market’ area.<sup>88</sup> As it is a predominantly white area, it is automatically perceived as a ‘safe’ space.

<sup>88</sup> According to Gustav Visser (2003), in his research of the gentrification of De Waterkant, this area was initially home to a racially mixed population, before the *Group Areas Act* (1969-1973) led to its establishment as an exclusively white area. During the 1970’s, the area became known in gay subcultures as a suburb with a strong gay overtone, and by the 1990’s, the process of gentrification led to white, middle-class (and often gay) men moving to this area and establishing businesses catering for the male gay market (Visser 2003: 128). Cape Town’s gay leisure consumption slowly gravitated towards this area as it became known as a ‘safer’, ‘cleaner’ area than the central business district of Cape Town (Visser 2003: 129). Even today, the whiteness of the area is

With the emphasis of the new Constitution on racial, sexual and gender equality, exclusively white areas appear to be an anomaly in the democratic space of South Africa. This is especially significant when considering that the very people who are excluding others from discursive and spatial constructions of gayness in the 'Gay Village' are supposed to know the brunt of discrimination from South Africa's own apartheid legacy. Thus the 'Gay Village' actually perpetuates the classist, racist and sexist principles of heteronormative society by creating a new marginal group within a sexual minority (Valdes 2002: 977). White patriarchy is transferred in this process from straight to gay society, and, instead of confronting the marginalisation that gay people had to (and still have to) fight against in normative society, it is merely replicated on a new level. White gay business owners and marketers are further marginalising lgbt black people by referring to their presence as a sign of 'unsafeness'. The ideals of a heteronormative society as it was articulated and officiated in apartheid South Africa (privileging white, heterosexual males) are thus reconstructed in the post-apartheid context without critically engaging in the problematic enunciation of hegemony. Visser aptly summarises this predicament when he argues that:

Despite the highly inclusive constitutional environment of South Africa, historically defined material imbalances have generated a White homomale territory displaying limited potential for other gay identity formation(s), affirmation(s) and development(s) in Cape Town's Gay Village (2003: 123).

Homonormativity functions in such gay spaces through exclusionary discourses that prohibit 'undesirable' forms of sexual expression (the gay 'perverts' and 'sickos'); those that might damage the 'respectability' of local gay consumer spaces (Bell & Binnie 2004: 1810-1811). Public spaces in various cities have accordingly been converted into 'gay villages' that are promoted as 'exotic', yet 'safe' leisure spaces "in order to attract mobile capital, most particularly in the form of international tourism" (Bell & Binnie 2004: 1816). Cape Town's 'Gay Village' is a specific example of the transformation of apparently democratic gay public space into a gentrified area of consumption in order to attract the pink economy of a 'global

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evident as the people who actively consume gayness in this space is mostly white inhabitants and tourists. While Cape Town's largest population group is 'coloured' (approximately 50%) and then black (approximately 25%), De Waterkant is not patronised nor its products consumed by either black and 'coloured' gays in these proportions (Visser 2003: 131).

gay' market. With the 'Gay Village' catering exclusively for the needs of middle-class, gay consumers, the hierarchic distinctions between a white elite and a black, underprivileged working force is perpetuated in this privileged and high-priced gay space.

#### **CHAPTER 4.3.1.2: CARNIVALESQUE TRANSGRESSIONS OF THE 'GAY VILLAGE'**

The *Cape Town Pride Parade* is largely determined and endorsed by the 'Gay Village'. Since its inception in 1993, the parade has started and ended in the vicinity of the 'Gay Village', and most of its after-carnival celebrations occurred in this space. It is financially supported by the businesses operating in this area<sup>89</sup>, and it therefore has to carry the consent of these institutions to secure economic input. Being so imbedded in this space, it seems inevitable that the *Cape Town Pride Parade* would carry some of the traces of exclusion found in the 'Gay Village', and would also yield to the 'global gay' proscriptions for a 'sanitised' sexual space.

In their investigation of homonormative tourist spaces, David Bell and John Binnie (2004) draw attention to the manner in which carnival is employed to market a city to gay consumers. With carnivals being popular events, they are often used by gay tourism industries to tap into the pink economy, and are marketed as 'global gay' mega-events in order to attract consumers.<sup>90</sup> Carnival is thus used to draw attention to certain cities as gay consumption spaces. Yet, in order to fit into the respectable and nicely gentrified 'gay villages' in which it is often hosted, carnival is supposed to shed any 'perverted' or 'dirty' activities and identities, so not to scare away the tourists. As Dereka Rushbrook says, "gay urban spectacles attract tourists and investment; sexually deviant, dangerous rather than risqué, landscapes do not" (2002: 195). The spectacle of carnivals and pride parades are presented to tourists as "commodified

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<sup>89</sup> Bars such as Bronx, Beulah, The Loft, and Café Manhattan, and restaurants such as The Village Café, Andiamo, and Saul's, are all establishments situated within the 'Gay Village'. They specifically market themselves to local and global gay tourists, and some of these establishments (such as Bronx, Beulah and Café Manhattan) also sponsor floats at the *Cape Town Pride Parade* that bear their insignia.

<sup>90</sup> The *Sydney Mardi Gras* (since 1978) and *New York City Pride March* (since 1970) are both massive events that have been recognised for their potential to draw enormous crowds. *The Sydney Mardi Gras* attracts up to half a million people, both residents and tourists, while the *New York City Parade* brings more than one million people to the streets of the city (Georgiou 2008; Kulwicky 2007). An economic impact survey calculated that the *Sydney Mardi Gras* contributes phenomenally (about \$100 million) to the Australian economy each year (*The History of Pride* 2008). The open promotion and acceptance of both these carnivals by the mainstream media of the cities are thus partially motivated by the huge amount of money that these events bring in.

encounters with difference”, a means to gaze at other gays who share a sanitised ‘universal’ gay identity, yet who present it in an ‘exotic’, different manner (Bell & Binnie 2004: 1813).

This appeal of gay tourist spaces (as explained by Bell and Binnie) is in itself contradictory, as the idea of a ‘global gay’ identity supposes that people from all over the world would share certain fundamental (Western) sexual, cultural, economic and political traits. Yet, those very features that resisted globalisation are now marketed as unique, ‘exotic’ local properties that appeal to gay tourists. A careful blend of the global and the local seems to be the most popular mix for gay consumers – the Cape Town gay experience, for instance, is marketed as ‘safe’ and ‘clean’ enough to live up to global standards, yet it is ‘exotic’ and ‘different’ enough to give it that *local tang*. Yet, with Cape Town and the ‘Gay Village’ specifically known for its racial and gendered exclusivity, how much of the local, of the ‘different’ and of the ‘unsafe’, can actually be displayed and mobilised within this space? And what is carnival’s relationship to the ambiguously ‘exotic’, yet ‘safe’ ‘Gay Village’?

From one point of view, the very homogeneity presented by the ‘Gay Village’ is contested during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* by the display of racial, gendered, sexual and cultural heterogeneity. During the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, multiple sexual identities are mobilised by a highly diverse crowd, and people who differ in terms of gender, race, culture, religion, class, age, etc., are congregated within the ‘Gay Village’. They are (temporarily) granted mobility within this space, and people who would usually not be consumers within and of the ‘Gay Village’, have the opportunity to express their identities in a space that does not usually condone it. Multiple ‘other’ identities (black, lesbian, transvestite, S&M, etc.) are brought into the exclusionary sphere of the ‘Gay Village’ during carnival, and temporarily invest it with a much needed blend of difference.

Yet, it is precisely this carnivalesque difference that attracts the tourists to the ‘Gay Village’ in the first place. People who would not ordinarily be seen in this space temporarily move through it and endow it with a festive atmosphere. They provide ‘exotic’ appeal for a limited period of time, and constitute visual stimulation for the tourist gaze, yet they conveniently leave after the event is finished and thus restore the ‘Gay Village’ to its former ‘safeness’ and ‘sanctity’. The local variety and difference that is actually allowed into this homonormative space is sanctioned by its temporary and spectacular nature. A zoo-like atmosphere pervades the scene as ‘other’ lgbt identities are showcased in the ‘safe’ environment of the ‘Gay



Village'. Would the tourists or the white 'Gay Villagers' go and visit a *Pride Parade* in a township? From my own experience, the opposite is actually true – the 'fringe' *Gay Parade Parade* of 2008 held in Guguletu was attended by a very small group of white participants, a few journalists, and almost no white tourists/spectators. It seems as if the 'safeness' of the 'Gay Village' bestows a sense of legality and attraction on carnival while it occurs within its boundaries. Carnival brings the 'exotic' and 'spectacular' (and black) into the 'Gay Village' – a nice change to the year's drab whiteness.

Carnival is thus granted a space of expression as long as it conforms to certain regulatory measures. The *Cape Town Pride Parade* is granted access to Cape Town's white dominion as it can contribute economically to the 'Gay Village'. This is evident in the very fact that the date during which the *Cape Town Pride Parade* was initially held has been moved over the years in order to attract more tourists to Cape Town and the 'Gay Village'. Primarily endorsed for its attraction of 'global gay' tourists to Cape Town and its 'Gay Village' during the busy February season, carnival is spatially inscribed with economic expectations. The appeal of the pink economy therefore seems to govern even the logistics of this carnival. As Ian Mchamon (the chairman of the *Pride* committee) explains, the vision of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is to be as big and popular as the *Sydney Mardi Gras*.<sup>91</sup>

Problems around the implicit exploitation of black participants for the 'exotic' appeal are compounded by the fact that the difference that is actually played out during carnival in gendered and racial terms is also severely limited. The amount of black people participating in the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is still disproportionate when compared to the amount of white participants. So too, the female participants are still largely overwhelmed by the men. Even though this has been challenged through a definite increase in black and/or female participants, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is still ruled by a white male elite. And, even though a serious attempt has been made to accommodate black lbgt participants in the *Cape Town Pride Parade*, the manner in which they are fringed by discourse and practice indicates that homonormative regulations still operate during carnival in the favouring of white gay men.

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<sup>91</sup> McMahan explains that the event has grown rapidly since its inception in 2001 and that his vision as Chairman is to "grow until it reaches the same magnitude of the *Sydney Lesbian and Gay Mardi Gras*" (cited in Nicholson 2008). McMahan argues that the *Cape Town Pride Parade* attracted about 10 000 people in 2007, and that he hoped to increase this number rapidly by means of corporate sponsorship and better attendance (interview with De Klerk 2008: 10).

### CHAPTER 4.3.1.3: MEDIA SPACES AND THE GAY PRESS

It is clear that, by being situated in and endorsed by the white male space of the 'Gay Village', carnival cannot be completely free of the exclusionary structures it aims to transgress. These exclusionary structures are not only visible in the physical space of the city and in the enactments of carnival, but also in the gay media spaces that are created around the Cape Town Pride Parade.

Media spaces are intricately tied to discourses of power and the discursive construction of gay/queer identity.<sup>92</sup> Of particular importance are gay media spaces that render visible queer identities that are often ignored or vindicated in the mainstream media. Gay media spaces aid in the 'imagining' of sexual identity by providing images and texts that narrate its transnational or local values in terms of shared sexual, cultural, social and/or political characteristics. According to Donald Donham, "this means, ipso facto, that identifying as gay is peculiarly dependant upon and bound up with modern media, with ways of communicatively linking up people across space and time" (1998: 15). Identifying as gay is therefore largely based on its discursive construction and who has access to it. As the social aspects of gay identity are largely narrated by the media, it provides valuable information to people who wish to identify as such. The media therefore plays a pivotal role in creating texts and images of gayness and circulating it amongst a local (or global) population. As Donham argues: "a certain communicative density is probably a prerequisite for people to identify as gay at all, and it is not impossible that as media density increases, so will the number of gay people" (1998: 15).

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<sup>92</sup> To a large extent, the media acts as a key institution that originates and then sustains prevailing discourses (MacDonald 2003: 10), and media-produced discourses and spaces often reflect the dominant ideologies of society's political and/or economic institutions (Lull 2000: 23). The media shapes and facilitates dominant ideologies by linking ideological representations with authority (Lull 2000: 89) and by gaining public endorsement of certain normative ideologies (Carter & Steiner 2004). "Media texts never simply mirror or reflect 'reality', but instead construct hegemonic definitions of what should be accepted as 'reality'. These definitions appear to be inevitable, 'real' and commonsensical. Thus, media images dissemble the extent to which they are aligned with the interests of powerful groups in society" (Carter & Steiner 2004: 2). The media disseminate ideological predispositions by promoting certain perspectives and excluding others and the mass media thus constitute and regulate social reality (Lull 2000: 94-95). Certain people are often excluded from the social reality that is created in media spaces; particularly marginalised ethnic and queer groups who struggle for representation and positive visibility within the media (MacDonald 2003: 12).

This is also true for the South African context, where “the values underlying...[lgbt] identities and relationships are written into legislation, and reflected in the media” (van Zyl 2005b: 25). The media can therefore be regarded as a barometer of changing attitudes towards lgbt identities. Media spaces replicate the adoption and various narrations of these identities within the contemporary South African context, as well as global discourses (of gayness or queerness) that are circulating in the local gay press. Yet, the media that are produced by and for gay subcultures are not a true reflection of the identities that are actually performed within South Africa as some identities remain anonymous and undefined in media discourses (van Zyl 2005b: 25). Gay media thus reveal those sexual identities that are allowed expression, and conceal those that are not.

This is evident in the South African gay press where “a particularised version of masculinity operates. A homo-masculinity, one which ensures (and secures) the needs of white gay male desires” (Reddy 1998: 68). The predominance of images of white men are not only found in the ‘global gay’ media (Donham 1998: 16), but also in the South African media where black bodies are visibly absent (Reddy 1998: 68). This is, in turn, also copied by Cape Town’s media spaces where white male homosexual desire is clearly privileged (Sonnekus 2007: 50).<sup>93</sup>

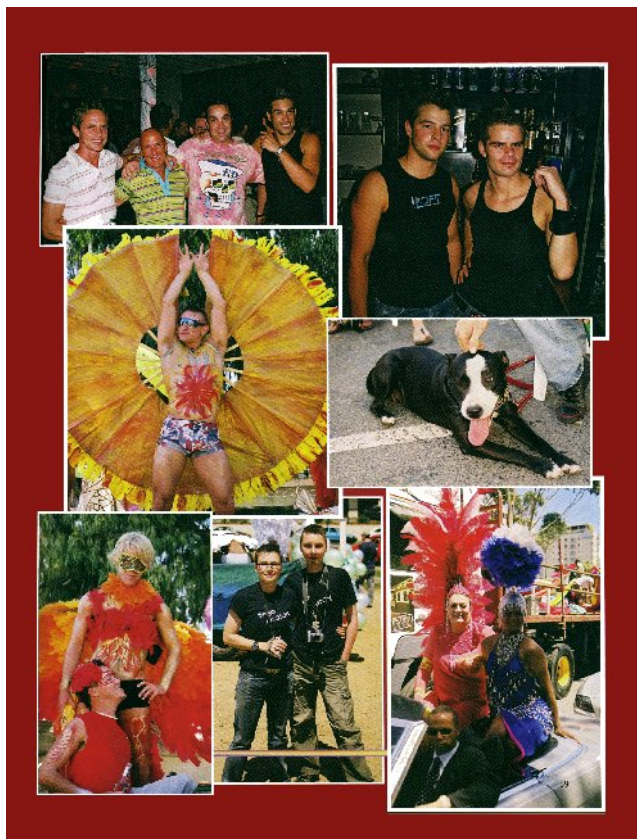
#### **CHAPTER 4.3.1.4: CARNIVAL AND THE GAY PRESS**

The *Cape Town Pride Parade* is not only situated within the physical city space of Cape Town and its ‘Gay Village’, but it is also discursively constructed and visually manifested in the media. It stands to reason that coverage of the event is particularly found in the gay media where it not only advertised, but photographs of the event are also published. While the advertisements usually consist of brief descriptions of the *Cape Town Pride Parade’s* history, photographs ranging from single images to one-page spreads are also included.

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<sup>93</sup> In Theo Sonnekus’s study of Cape Town’s De Waterkant area as a space of homomale desire, he found that the media spaces that are created for promoting this area caters predominantly for gay white males. White ‘patriarchy’ still dominates both the physical and media spaces of this area as it endorses white, male homosexual desire above all other sexualities, genders and races (Sonnekus 2007: 53). Sonnekus found that most of the images created in the media for advertisements or notices pertaining to the ‘Gay Village’ were of white men, while black and female lgbt identities were largely ignored.

Two of the most prominent media sources that covered the *Cape Town Pride Parade* of 2008, was the *Gay Pages* magazine (the Winter publication) and the *Pink Tongue* newspaper (the April publication). Both contained one-page spreads with photographs documenting this carnival – see Figures 20 and 21 for the respective spreads of the *Gay Pages* and *Pink Tongue*.



**Figure 20.**  
Unknown Photographer, *Cape Town Pride* (2008).  
Photograph Spread. (*Cape Town Pride* 2008: 59)



**Figure 21.**  
Andrew Wicks, *Untitled* (2008).  
Photograph Spread. (*Pride Parade: Pride Heroes: Everyone's a Hero*. 2008: 22)

Pertinent to both these examples is the predominance of images of white men, particularly in the *Gay Pages* spread. In both these publications, the images of white men are significantly more than those of black or female lgbt participants. Although the demographic profile of the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is overwhelmingly white and male, this imbalance is exaggerated in the documentation of this event in the *Gay Pages* – of the (approximately) 13 participants photographed, 11 are male and 12 are white. The *Pink Tongue* spread is more equitable in

its presentation of different genders and races, and even though white men still outnumber the rest, it is far less evident than in the other spread.

This cannot be a coincidence, since the *Gay Pages* generally contains almost no images of black lgbt identities. Advertisements and features are entirely dominated by a multitude of images of white men, while only a few black men are ever included.<sup>94</sup> Of the coverage page photographs that were used over the last twelve years, *all* are of white men. With the *Gay Pages* established as “the largest, most widely read gay publication in South Africa” (*Gay Pages: About Us*. 2008), this lack of recognition for black lgbt identities is significant. It appears as if even a South African democracy and a new Constitution could not change the obstinately white, male image that persists in most gay media spaces.

It is also important to note that, even though the *Cape Town Pride Parade* is still a mostly white male activity that occurs within the homonormative space of the ‘Gay Village’, the extent to which this carnival is becoming inclusive in terms of race and gender can be seriously misrepresented in the media. Depending on the images selected, carnival can be represented as either exclusively white or male, or as inclusive of black and lesbian queers. The general public’s opinion of carnival is also not only established by their own experiences, but by what the media presents to them. With certain gay media spaces in effect censoring black identities, the biased representation of carnival can recreate gayness within the public imagination as yet another space where only white male identities are performed. Thus carnival’s own opposition to normative regulations and systems of exclusion can be severely limited by white homonormative ideologies that are enforced in certain media spaces.

#### **CHAPTER 4.3.2: AFRICAN GAY IDENTITIES AND QUESTIONS OF AUTHENTICITY**

It is clear that access to space – be it to the ‘Gay Village’ during carnival, media spaces, or Cape Town in general – is governed by homonormative processes that establish whiteness, maleness and affluence as the principle ‘gay norms’. Black lgbt identities, with little room for spatial representation, are often denied the breathing space to (re)negotiate themselves within the contemporary South African context. These identities are not only prevented from exiting

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<sup>94</sup> Of the more than 200 people used in the photographs for this magazine, I counted 5 black men. This is not isolated to this (Winter) publication, but both the Summer and the Spring publications of 2008 showed the same bias.

the colonial and apartheid closets of the past, but they are deprived of spatial expressions that would grant them same 'authenticity' and 'validity' as white gay identities. With the predominance of South African and global gay discourses drawing on white narratives and histories, black sexualities are fringed, if not erased.

#### **CHAPTER 4.3.2.1: AFRICAN GAY IDENTITIES: HISTORIES OF CONTESTATION AND AVOWAL**

The apparent lack of 'other' (non-white) gay expressions within the South African context is not only linked to the exclusionary structures laid down through homonormative regulations (as seen in the 'Gay Village'), but also through heteronormative conventions that often invest black homosexuality with negative associations. The current renegotiations of identities within post-apartheid South Africa and post-colonial Africa have led to enquiries into the hegemonic Western structures that are imbedded locally. In this process of renegotiation, critiques of colonialism and Western hegemony are frequently lodged against the 'Western imports'; the products, cultures, and identities that were brought into and enforced upon the local population. Local identities are particularly scrutinised for signs of authenticity; for traits and histories that could reveal whether they are genuinely 'African', or an 'unAfrican' import. Of particular importance in this regard is the current questioning of gay identities and their 'authenticity'.

The issue of homosexuality's place within the African sphere is highly contentious as it hinges on the supposed 'immorality' of Western sexual discourses that were imposed on the African population. The homophobic treatment of homosexuals as 'unAfrican' impostors is echoed in the accusations of various African leaders (such as Robert Mugabe, Yoweri Museveni, Sam Nujoma, Jacob Zuma, and others) that homosexuality is a perverted, bourgeois Western phenomenon. They view homosexuality as a colonial identity that was imposed on, and hence assimilated by, black Africans. This sentiment is found, for instance, in Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe's much publicised condemnation of homosexuality in 1995 during the International Book Fair:

I find it extremely outrageous and repugnant to my human conscience that such immoral and repulsive organisations, like those of homosexuals who offend both against the law of nature and the morals of religious beliefs espoused by our

society, should have any advocates in our midst and even elsewhere in the world.

If we accept homosexuality as a right, as is being argued by the association of sodomists and sexual perverts what moral fibre shall our society ever have to deny organised drug addicts, or even those given to bestiality, the rights they might claim and allege they possess under the rubrics of individual freedom and human rights, including the freedom of the Press to write, publish, and publicise their literature on them? (1995)<sup>95</sup>

Even though Mugabe received worldwide criticism when he stated at the event that homosexuals were "worse than pigs and dogs" and had no civil rights in Zimbabwe (cited in McNeal 1998), his sentiments are echoed by various African leaders throughout the continent.<sup>96</sup> Homosexuality is accordingly regarded as an 'un-African', 'imported' and 'immoral' culture that entails the 'perverted' activities/identities practiced predominantly by whites. In the same vein, the 'Africanness' of lgbt identities are also a point of dispute in the media – *Sunday Sun* columnist Jon Qwelane provoked a local uproar when he recently wrote that 'gay is NOT okay' and compared homosexuality with bestiality (2008: 14).<sup>97</sup> Qwelane, criticising South Africa's liberal constitution for permitting 'gay lifestyles' to be displayed openly, also felt that "there would be a few things [about which] I could take issue with

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<sup>95</sup> The brunt of President Mugabe's critique during the official opening of the fair was lodged against the *Association of Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe*, who set up a stall at Zimbabwe's annual *International Book Fair* in August 1995 in Harare.

<sup>96</sup> According to Jacob Rukweza (an activist for *Zimbabwe's Gays and Lesbians Organisation*), Mugabe's attitude towards homosexuality as an 'imported' culture that is exclusively practiced by whites, represents a dominant perception among many African leaders (2006). For example: Yoweri Museveni (President of Uganda) called on the Ugandan police in January 2003 to arrest all homosexuals or anyone indulging in 'unnatural', 'unAfrican' sexual practices, while Sam Nujoma (who was still President of Namibia until 2003) also told international journalists that homosexuality was a "borrowed subculture, alien to Africa and Africans" (quoted in Rukweza 2006). The latest in this line of African leaders is Jacob Zuma who declared at Heritage Day celebrations in 2006 that same-sex marriages were "a disgrace to the nation and to God" (quoted in *Mail & Guardian* 2006).

<sup>97</sup> This column incited protests by various queer organisations. For example, Ian McMahon, *Cape Town Pride* chairman, organised an impromptu *Pride* protest outside the *Media 24* buildings in Cape Town. This protest was staged to highlight the attack on the constitutional- and human rights of gay people, and what McMahon referred to as "Qwelane's blatant hate speech" (*Cape Town Pride Press Release* 2008). During this protest, McMahon handed a petition, calling for a retraction and apology to gay people, to the *Media 24* managing director Abraham van Zyl. *Media 24* officially distanced themselves from the contents of Qwelane's column (*Media 24 Newspapers Press Release* 2008), yet Qwelane has not apologised to date.

Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, but his unflinching and unapologetic stance over homosexuals is definitely not among those” (2008: 14).

This is not only found in the attitudes of African leaders and journalists, but can even be traced to general critiques of colonial racism. Franz Fanon’s text *Black Skin, White Masks* (first published in 1952) was one of the first post-colonial works that explicitly associated white racism with homosexuality. In this work, Fanon controversially stated that “the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual” (1967: 156). This work provided a much needed theoretical basis to account for the divided and often inferior self-perception of the black subject, yet it also gave voice to the notion that homosexuality is inseparable from racism and white patriarchy.<sup>98</sup> Even though Fanon’s statement reflects a conscious act of dissociating Africa from the ‘primitive’ and ‘perverse’ sexual stereotypes that pervaded colonial discourses (Desai 2001: 147), it reveals the problematic employment of homosexuality as a category that denotes (Western) ‘deviance’. Homosexuality is thus often made the scapegoat for issues ranging from colonial oppression and racial discrimination, to fears of moral degeneracy and national insecurity.

The debate around homosexuality being either ‘African’ or ‘unAfrican’ centres around the issue of gay identity as a Western construct, and therefore also a Western import. In the South African context, homosexuality and gay identities were often stereotyped as not only “a colonial import, but...as a disorder brought about by the oppressive social structures of apartheid” (Spurlin 2001: 189). Pre-colonial African identity is equated with heterosexuality, while gay identity constructions are regarded as the ‘object’ product of colonial oppression. Particularly gay male identities are seen as bourgeois Western phenomena, as ‘feminised’ imperial imprints within the masculine domain of African nation states (Spurlin 2001: 197). It is significant that the threat of homosexuality in the African context is often narrated in terms of its supposed feminisation of African nationality and identity. As Leatt and Hendricks argue

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<sup>98</sup> Fanon’s investigation of colonial psychology, which is often regarded as the “cornerstone of an inquiry into the intersections of racial subjectivity and social power” (Bergner 1995: 76), also criticises white homosexuals for bringing their ‘perverted’, ‘racist’ desires to bear “upon a resolutely heterosexual Africa” (Desai 2001: 146). Racism is seen by Fanon as a “homosexual territory” (1967: 183), and homosexuality is thus “demonised as both a cause and an effect of the...psychosexual organisation of racism” (Dollimore 1997: 33). I read Fanon’s statement as a sign of general homophobic attitudes that circulated discourses on African identity since his statement reveals a common denunciation of homosexuality that is found in African as well as earlier European discourses.



(2005: 313), the condemnation of homosexuality as 'unAfrican' reveals the desire of certain Africans to reassert the validity and virility of their culture, its masculinity, which were often ignored or debased in colonial discourses. Colonialism transformed African masculinities by creating "positions of domination and subordination...along the lines of race, bequeathing to the region [South Africa] the language of white men and black 'boys'" (Morrell 1998: 605). In these heteronormative African discourses, a black gay identity is seen as a form of 'perversion' that not only points to white domination, but that threatens to replicate the colonial emasculation of the African male.

Ironically, the persecution of homosexuality can in itself be seen as a colonial import. 'Sodomy' and other 'perverse acts' were often considered by colonial rulers to be typical of the 'immoral' (African) inhabitants of colonised lands, and homosexuality was regarded by European colonists as characteristically 'African' and 'unEuropean' (Bleys 1996: 32). With homosexuality considered 'deviant' by colonial rulers, the actual persecution of homosexuals in contemporary Africa has its roots in the continent's previous colonial institutions.<sup>99</sup> In the South African context, British colonial rule specifically viewed homosexuality as an abomination, and colonisers tried to stop same-sex practices by forbidding homosexuality by law (Herdt 1997: 80). Homosexuality therefore appears to be judged in contemporary Africa as 'unnatural' and 'unAfrican' by the very standards that were intrinsically imposed through colonial rule. The condemnation of homosexuality in Africa on the basis of its 'colonial imposition' reflects a deeply grounded heteronormative, colonial structure of prejudice and persecution that is still prevalent in contemporary African discourses. These regulatory structures are ironically used as a safeguard of 'authentic' African identity formations, and they intrinsically detest any 'abnormality' that could threaten heterosexual, masculine domination. As Gustav Desai aptly asserts, "in some African contexts it was not *homosexuality* that was inherited from the West but rather a more regulatory *homophobia*" (2001: 148).

Recent studies on African sexualities challenge these strains of homophobia by contesting the notion of Africa as an 'authentic' heterosexual territory. Research on African sexuality is re-

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<sup>99</sup> Leo Igwe argues in this regard that Western social, cultural and political ideologies were assimilated in postcolonial African discourses (2008). African countries blindly adopted the laws of their previous colonisers after independence – for instance, the former British colonies of Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and Ghana reinstated the British common law which prohibited homosexuality (2008). Igwe maintains that homosexuality is considered a 'crime' and 'deviance' in many African countries due to colonial legislation that African governments have refused to review or abandon.

(and un-) covering historical material that documents various same-sex practices that can be found locally. Dunbar Moodie's research on same-sex activities among male workers in South African mines (1988) was one of the first studies to openly address homosexuality among Southern African men<sup>100</sup>, while Judith Gay's study of lesbian relationships in Lesotho (1985) also provided a much needed basis for future documentation of homosexuality amongst African women<sup>101</sup>. Later research opened up the discursive space of African sexual practices by emphasising the fluidity and multiplicity of these acts. For instance, David Greenberg's study of the construction of African homosexuality (1988: 60-69) records multiple (homo)sexual practices that can be found amongst contemporary and pre-colonial African societies, while Will Roscoe and Stephen Murray (1998) document same-sex practices in fifty societies found in most regions of the African continent.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Moodie investigated the occurrence of "mine marriages" amongst males who worked in South African mines (1988). Even though his work was groundbreaking in its investigation of homosexuality amongst black men, it has also been criticised for its supposedly heteronormative perspective that presents black homosexuality as a 'temporary aberration', as the homosexual 'tendencies' described by Moodie are solely the product of inhumane labour systems (Spurlin 2001: 189-190; see also Achmat 1993). Hugh McLean and Linda Ngcobo have re-examined these mine marriages in order to produce a more nuanced depiction of black male homosexuality by stressing that same-sex acts among these men are produced by homosexual *desire*, and they are not a mere "mechanical and necessary substitute for heterosexual life" (1995: 166). These studies reveal how changing attitudes towards homosexuality affect the reading and recovering of same-sex activities and identities within the (South) African context.

<sup>101</sup> Gay's investigation of homosexual relationships between black women in Lesotho presented them as affectionate affairs that were both sexual *and emotional* in character (1985: 102-103, 111). Her investigation consciously differed from Moodie's account in her emphasis of homosexuality amongst black women as a recognised social institution within Lesotho culture, not a substitute sexual release when the opposite sex was not available (1985: 112).

<sup>102</sup> Roscoe and Murray compiled a range of anthropological reports of same-sex practices that occur in various regional sections of Africa. By assembling multiple historical and contemporary accounts of homosexuality, Roscoe and Murray provide a theoretical basis that "refutes claims that African societies lacked homosexual patterns and had no words for those who desire their own sex. Evidence of same-sex patterns has been reported...for some fifty African societies, all of which had words – many words, with many meanings – for them." (1998: 267). Roscoe and Murray's compilation provides a substantial account of same-sex practices and patterns that are not only found in contemporary societies, but also in 'traditional' and 'indigenous' practices that predate colonial contact.

### CHAPTER 4.3.2.2: AFRICAN GAY IDENTITIES AND CARNIVAL

The 'unAfricanness' of homosexuality is not only challenged by historical and anthropological accounts of black homosexual activities, but it is also visually contested during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* when certain participants mobilise cultural signifiers to assert their identities as simultaneously black, African and gay/queer. Increasingly, black participants bring certain 'African' signifiers into play when they celebrate their lgbt identity during this parade. Their presence, as I discussed earlier, is still disproportionate when compared to the amount of white participants, yet the apparent 'lack' of black homosexual expressions within the Cape Town (and larger South African) sphere are actively countered by certain participants who challenge those heteronormative conventions that invest black homosexuality with negative associations.

In Figure 22, participants use clothing and make-up to bring their own associations with Africa to the fore.



**Figure 22.**

Ernst van der Wal, *Untitled* (2008).

Digital Photograph.

The participant in the centre of this photograph is not only celebrating her gay/queer identity, but also demonstrating her African heritage. The identity she performs links her sexuality with her ethnicity, since she deliberately chose clothes that are to be read as essentially 'African' by

spectators<sup>103</sup>, and incorporated these signs in the visual repertoire that makes up her rendition of African homosexuality. Within the spectacle of carnival, she constructs her gay/queer identity as African by making these traits seem inextricably linked, rather than incompatible categories. Carnival thus provides the ideal platform on which to (re)construct and reinvest identity formations by actively combating stereotypical assumptions of homosexuality's 'unAfrican' nature. Since it is so strongly visual in nature, carnival can aid in the renegotiation of certain sensitive issues; it can visually translate and fuse particular concepts ('Africa', 'gayness/queerness') into a 'new' identities ('gay/queer African').

It is also important to consider that this participant (as all other participants in carnival) forms part of the performances surrounding her. With multiple and simultaneous enactments of identity within the spectacle of carnival, no performance is absolutely singular as all are witnessed, acted upon and situated within the larger sphere of carnival. This participant's performance of identity is therefore not a closed-off, restricted act, but is witnessed as part of the various identities that are performed around her. The multiple gay/queer identities that are enacted (be it African or European, black or white, gay, bisexual, transgendered, etc.) all share the stage of one carnival, all move through the streets of Cape Town for one day. They are thus seen as sharing one essential component – their construction of gay/queer identities.

### **CHAPTER 4.3.3: CARNIVAL, HOMONORMATIVITY, AND THE 'GLOBAL GAY' CONCLUDED**

After the fall of apartheid, South African sexual identities were given much more discursive space within which to reorientate themselves. Yet, the concurrent commodification of queer identities has led to a restriction of the gay imaginary. Narrations of 'global gayness' clearly favours white, male, affluent expressions of identity, and this is reflected in discourses of consumption that appeals to the 'universally liberated' gay subject. Heteronormative discourses surrounding the 'unAfricanness' of gay identities, also severely limits the expression of gay/queer identities. The various spaces and discourses that I investigated in this chapter reveal how both heteronormative *and* homonormative processes reduce the expression of

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<sup>103</sup> Certain signifiers (the red dress, Xhosa face decorations, etc.) are understood by spectators as evidence of a certain 'traditional' identity that is played out. This may not necessarily be 'true' – the participant may not even be a 'traditional African' and the deductions made are largely based upon the spectator's stereotypical assumptions about what real 'traditional Africanness' entails. Yet the participant's conscious mobilisation of certain cultural signifiers in order to call up references of Africa in her performance is indisputable.

various queer identities to (stereotypical, 'unAfrican' and commodified, phallogentric) gay identities within the space of South Africa, and specifically of Cape Town.

My investigation of carnival's relation to heteronormative and/or homonormative spaces reveals it to be highly ambiguous. From one point of view, the homogeneity that is enforced by homonormative spaces (such as the 'Gay Village') is contested during the *Cape Town Pride Parade* by introducing racial, gendered, and sexual heterogeneity into these spaces. Heteronormative discourses and the supposed 'unAfricanness' of gay/queer identities are also challenged during this carnival by performances of African identities. On the other hand, the variety that is actually allowed into normative spaces during carnival is sanctioned by its 'spectacular' and 'exotic' nature – it becomes a commodity in itself that is marketed to a gay audience and consumed by tourists. 'Other' (black, 'coloured') identities are showcased in the 'safe' environment of normative space in order to attract the pink economy of affluent, predominantly white, gay spectators. While carnival allows various identities to be explored, it also loses many of its transgressive properties by being dependant on a certain space to sanction its enactment. Homonormative spaces can be particularly powerful in this instance as they actually employ carnival as a marketing event to boost (white) tourism and cash in on the pink economy.

## CONCLUSION

*Transgression. Perhaps one day it will seem as decisive for our culture, as much part of its soil, as the experience of contradiction was at an earlier time for dialectical thought. Transgression does not seek to oppose one thing to another...it does not transform the other side of the mirror...into a glittering expanse...its role is to measure the excessive distance that it opens at the heart of the limit and to trace the flashing line that causes that limit to arise (Foucault 1977: 35-36).*

Carnival is often represented as a form of festival that has the capacity to transgress the social hierarchies and normative regulations of certain spaces. Bakhtin's theorisation of carnival presents it as a force that has the capacity to disrupt social stability, oppose normative order and instigate riot. My own investigation, however, reveals carnival as simultaneously transgressive and compliant, and suggests that the processes through which sexual identity and carnivalesque space are visualised are multifarious and contradictory in their manifestation. By concurrently drawing on a global economy of commodified identities and postponed local desires, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* has to cater for much more than Bakhtin's vision of carnival could have envisaged.

Carnival's spatial nature demands negotiation with established city structures and authorities – carnival cannot exclusively yield to or withstand the rules laid down by the city, but mostly does both. Normative structures of city are not only opposed by carnival but also replicated in persisting heteronormative and homonormative discourses. The *Cape Town Pride Parade*, which posits itself as a force aimed at “Uniting [the] Cultures of Cape Town” (*The History of Cape Town Pride*. 2008), is thus severely limited in this endeavour as it often reproduces the exclusionary structures of the spaces it is situated in.

To a large extent, the *Cape Town Pride Parade* distances itself from the discriminatory and normative discourses that are inscribed in Cape Town's physical and ideological structure. This carnival also creates a platform for a self-reflexive investigation and queering of sexual identities. Acting as a form of dialogue through which space and identity are (re)negotiated, carnival provides a necessary link through which identities draw upon each other and exchange meaning. Yet, through homonormative regulations that are spatially and discursively enforced during carnival, visual explorations of divergent queer identities are ultimately reduced to commodified, phallogentric gayness that slot into global categories. Changes

within the local sexual landscape have resulted in queer negotiations of identity not merely drawing on or reacting to heteronormative vocabularies, but even grappling with homonormative proscriptions.

Even though carnival may be severely limited in terms of the narratives it presents as forms of opposition to normative society, these narrations are nonetheless crucial. In the renegotiation of identity and space, carnival is indicative of changes that occur (or may still take place) within the South African arena and, in studying this event, our sexual landscape's transformation (and lack thereof) can be charted. It is important to keep in mind that carnival occupies a liminal position as it is simultaneously sustained by order and order's opposition – the *Cape Town Pride Parade* bridges a gap between the normative and transgressive that would in everyday life be pronounced in the identities and spaces of the city. Carnival is not solely a point of congregation for transgressive identities, but it also draws in the normative order that these identities oppose – carnival thus provides a site of contact, a stage for reaction where continuing discourses of discrimination and marginalisation can be visualised and countered.

Carnival may be a form of celebration infamous for its frivolity, yet its display of censure by normative institutions should not be mistaken for mere light-heartedness. Carnival is a signifier of both the identities that are displayed and also those that are marked by their absence – those queer expressions that are silenced and concealed by the normative structures of city and discourse. Our young (and fragile) democracy is clearly visualised during carnival where queer identities are only starting to rewrite their erased histories, embodiments and visualisations. As a visual spectacle geared towards the senses, carnival demands watchfulness and action, and for this reason it can be scrutinised for changing regimes of the (hetero- and homo-) normative that appear within its domain. As my investigation reveals, carnival is a site from which shifting distances between the centre and the margin, normative discourses and their limits, can be charted by tracing the various narratives, the *flashing lines* that may cause these limits, the marginal spaces and identities, to arise.

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