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THE URBAN UNDERCLASS AND POST-AUTHORITARIAN JOHANNESBURG: TRAIN SURFING (SOWETO STYLE) AS AN EXTREME SPATIAL PRACTICE

by

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SUMMARY

Title of dissertation:	The urban underclass and post-authoritarian Johannesburg: train surfing (Soweto style) as an extreme spatial practice
Name of student:	Hilke Steenkamp
Supervisor:	Prof. AA du Preez
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This dissertation aims to position train surfing as a visual spectacle that is practised by Sowetan train surfers within the context of post-authoritarian Johannesburg. The author argues that train surfing is a visual and spatial phenomenon that is theoretically under-researched. As such, this study aims to decode seven train surfing videos to establish what train surfing looks like, where train surfing occurs and why individuals participate in such a high risk activity. This study, furthermore, aims to frame train surfing as a spectacle by investigating the similarities between train surfing and rites of passage (initiation rites). The author also regards train surfing as a very specific form of storytelling. The narratives conveyed in the seven videos are, therefore, interpreted to establish that train surfing is practised to 'voice' fatalistic feelings, societal as well as individual crises.

After establishing the visual aspects of train surfing, the author focuses on the spatial context of train surfing. Johannesburg is described as both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct by tracing the spatial and political history of the city. When the discussion turns to the post-authoritarian city, townships and squatter settlements are analysed as being both marginal and hybrid spaces. It is argued that townships are marginal spaces due to their location, they are inhabited by the underclass and they are formed by processes of capitalism and urbanisation, and as a result of these factors, township residents might have fatalistic mindsets (Gulick 1989). The author, however, contends that township space is an ambivalent construct, and as such, it can also be read as hybrid space. Here, hybrid space is interpreted as a platform from which township

residents can resist oppressing spatial and political ideologies. In this context, train surfing is regarded as one way in which train surfers use hybrid space to express tactics of resistance.

After establishing the spatial context of train surfing, the socio-economic and material living conditions of train surfers are investigated. The discussion firstly, explores the underclass, as theorised by Jencks and Peterson (1990), and thereafter highlights why train surfers can be classified as being part of this sub-category. It is, furthermore, argued that Sowetan train surfers are part of a new lost generation due to high unemployment rates, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and bleak future outlooks. The author aims to establish that, as a result of their socio-economic status and material living conditions, train surfers are fatalistic, and practice an extreme activity to exert control over one area of their lives, namely their bodies.

Lastly, the dissertation aims to explore train surfing as being both a risk-taking activity and a new spatial practice. The dynamics of adolescent risk-taking behaviour is explored by emphasising the psychological motivations behind high risk activities. The author argues that alienating space can be regarded as an additional factor that usher adolescents into risk-taking activities. As such, the place(s) and space(s) inhabited by train surfers, namely Johannesburg, Soweto and township train stations, are discussed as alienating spaces. Moreover, it is argued that alienating spaces create opportunities for resistance (following the power-resistance dialectic inherent to space), and as such, train surfing is interpreted as a de-alienating spatial practice that enables the marginalised train surfer to exert control over his surroundings.

KEY TERMS

Train surfing; spectacle; performative theory; authoritarian and post-authoritarian Johannesburg; marginal and hybrid space; townships; underclass; lost generation; fatalism; risk-taking behaviour; spatial practice; alienation; de-alienation; agency; Debord; Foucault; Lefebvre; Soja; De Certeau.

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Deo gratias!

Deo adjuvante non timendum.

Horas non numero nisi serenas.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and aims of study

Train surfing is an extreme activity that involves riders climbing or 'surfing' on top of the roof or on the outside of a moving train. This daredevil act of bravado has become a worldwide phenomenon from Germany to Australia, Finland, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Brazil and South Africa. In some countries it has become a banned activity and strict regulations are enforced to stop this extreme behaviour that has resulted in several fatalities. In South Africa the practice has become particularly popular with the youth of Soweto and although it is highly risky, often leading to death or debilitating injuries, the popularity of the extreme practice does not seem to subside.

The train surfing phenomenon is visually well-documented, but as little academic research is available on this complex topic, the route followed to analyse this unique activity is described as a four-tier investigation. Each tier attempts to highlight the elements of train surfing as applicable to Visual Cultural Studies. The first tier details the visual aspects of train surfing: what the practice entails as well as the visual components of the spectacle or performance. The second tier investigates the place(s) and space(s) wherein train surfing is performed. Johannesburg is analysed as both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct and townships are interpreted as marginal and hybrid spaces. Socio-economic impetuses that influence train surfers such as the underclass from which they emerge are explored in the third tier to offer possible explanations for this extreme spatial activity. The last tier is mainly a theoretical interpretation of train surfing that proposes that risk-taking behaviour is influenced by alienating space(s). Here train surfing is interpreted as a subversive spatial practice and when marginalised train surfers engage in this practice it results in a state of de-alienation and restoration of a degree of agency.

Based on the four outlined tiers, this dissertation aims to explore the visual characteristics of train surfing by analysing visual documentation thereof (i.e. *YouTube* videos, television news reports and a documentary). The visual analysis aims to establish that train surfing is a spectacle of the North (Europe) and a spectacle of the South (South Africa and Brazil). It also aims to ascertain that train surfing is a spectacle performed for an audience and when the spectacle is interpreted, different strands of narration are revealed.

This study also intends to frame Johannesburg as both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct by investigating the history of the city as well as the effect that different political regimes, capitalism and urbanisation had on the city. Thereafter the study aims to establish that the character of township space can be interpreted as being both marginal and hybrid. The township of Soweto is also explored as a place of struggle where the marginalised have to constantly negotiate, subvert and resist dominant ideologies inscribed onto space to construct meaningful lives.

This study, furthermore, aims to establish that train surfers originate from a growing sub-population namely the urban underclass. In substantiation of this, certain characterisitcs of the urban underclass namely poverty, exclusion and marginalisation are explored alongside the immediate social milieu of train surfers. The origins of Soweto's lost generation are traced and it is proposed that train surfers are part of a new lost generation based on their fatalistic outlook on life.

Another aim of this study is to explore train surfing as not only a fatalistic practice, but also as risk-taking behaviour that is practised by marginalised people. It is also proposed that risk-taking behaviour is a response to alienating city and township space. To corroborate this, the three spaces in which train surfing occurs (Johannesburg, Soweto and township train stations) are scrutinised as alienating spaces. The dissertation furthermore aims to establish that train surfing is a unique spatial practice by investigating which activities constitute spatial practices and by listing various figures of

mobility. Lastly, the author intends to unpack train surfing as an agency-giving act that helps marginalised individuals overcome their alienated position in society.

1.2   Brief literature review

This brief literature review follows the four-tier investigation structure as outlined earlier. Essays from Victor Turner (1984), John MacAloon (1984) and Barbara Meyerhoff (1984) prove helpful in establishing the link between the purely visual act of train surfing and the theoretical aspects related to it, namely that train surfing is a performance or spectacle enacted for a wide variety of audiences. Meyerhoff's (1984:156) presupposition that performances create "arena[s] for appearing" is particularly useful when arguing that train surfing is an act that leads train surfers from a state of being socially invisible to being visible. Related characteristics of the spectacle namely that the spectacle must be awe-inspiring and that it is an intensified act that frames a certain ritual are highlighted by MacAloon. This is relevant to the study as it is argued that train surfing is an extremely dangerous activity that is performed as an initiation rite (rite of passage). Sophia Morgan's (1984) essay regarding rituals and narratives is also incorporated to investigate the different narratives that are 'surfed' or expressed by train surfers.

The place(s) and space(s) where train surfing occur are investigated by firstly tracing the history of Johannesburg. Findings from GA Leyds (1964), MS Appelgryn (1985) and *Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* (1986) are used to outline the historical and political character of the city. The overview of Johannesburg as authoritarian space incorporates AJ Christopher and James Tarver's (1994) as well as Anthony Lemon and Gillian Cook's (1994) detailed discussion on apartheid spatial practices such as segregation and the establishment of townships. Reference is also made to John Gulick (1989) who argues that migration and urbanisation are two additional factors that have influenced the spatial character of cities such as Johannesburg. Johannesburg as post-authoritarian space is discussed by incorporating various tenets of post-authoritarianism such as: growth and development; city space that (to some extent) stays trapped in its apartheid form; the rewriting of space through the erection of memorials and museums; as well as urbanism

and new forms of control. When these tenets are discussed reference is made to research conducted by Loren Landau (2007), Edgar Pieterse (2006), Gary Baines (2006) as well as Charlotte Lemanski, Karina Landman and Matthew Durington (2008).

After establishing the city as an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct, townships and squatter settlements are investigated as marginal and hybrid spaces. Authors such as Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (2005) as well as William Mangin (1980) and Denis McElrath (1980) contribute to the argument that townships can be interpreted as marginal spaces due to their peripheral location along with the impact of urbanisation and unabsorbed migrant labourers on cities. The issue of hybridity is explored by making use of Jordache Ellapen's (2007) and Katharyne Mitchell's (1997) research. Their research highlights that hybrid space offers township residents different opportunities such as interacting with space to resist and rewrite dominant narratives or ideologies. Lastly, the township of Soweto is described as a site of struggle. Here research conducted by Ashley Dawson (2004) and Sifiso Ndlovu (1998) is used to frame the historical Soweto as a militarised space.

To contextualise the phenomenon of train surfing, the specific class to which train surfers belong is explored. Christopher Jencks and Paul E Peterson compiled *The urban underclass* (1990) wherein urban analysts investigate a new dimension to the urban crisis, namely the underclass. This study attempts to adapt and incorporate some key notions regarding the underclass, namely, poverty, exclusion and marginalisation, to demonstrate how train surfers form part of this growing sub-population as described by Jencks and Peterson as well as Asef Bayat (2000). Susan Parnell (2005) tries to define the poor in post-apartheid South Africa. She states that "the basic reason why urban poverty is consistently underestimated ... is that it is almost always contrasted with rural poverty" (Parnell 2005:24). The poor do not live in rural areas anymore and a new classification of the urban poor must be invented as the poor now migrate to urban townships in the search for employment. The reality of urban demographics is thus scrutinised by incorporating Parnell's analysis of poverty in South Africa. To narrow the focus to train surfers' social milieu and circumstances, research conducted by Jill Swart-Kruger and Louise Chawla

(2002), Marks Chabedi (2003), Achille Mbembe, Nsizwa Dlamini and Grace Khunou (2004), Magaret Westaway (2006), Anni Hesselink (2008), Linda Richter, Saadhna Panday, Tanya Swart and Shane Norris (2009), as well as Carren Ginsberg, Shane Norris, Linda Richter and David Coplan (2009) is surveyed. Key features of the daily living conditions such as housing conditions and unemployment, failing family structures and drug and alcohol abuse are discussed alongside the findings of the aforementioned authors. Gang culture is another feature of life in townships like Soweto. Clive Glaser's (1998a & 1998b) accounts of gang formation are used to substantiate the argument that current train surfing gangs are formed to attain social status, to construct masculine identities and to control township space. To further the argument that daily living conditions influence young township residents and usher them into participating in fatalistic practices such as train surfing, the focus shifts to the formation of a new lost generation. Here Jeremy Seekings' (1996) and Chabedi's (2003) inquiries are used to elucidate the historical roots of South Africa's lost generation and the traits of Soweto's lost generation. Lastly, it is argued that fatalism is a mindset experienced by members of lost generations. Christopher Whelan's (1996) interpretation of fatalism and Scott Cummings' (1977) statement that marginal figures are fatalistic are used to discuss the fatalistic mindset of Soweto's train surfers.

Lastly, train surfing is positioned as a risk-taking activity practiced by marginalised individuals. David Le Breton (2004) explores risk-taking behaviour among adolescents and his encompassing account is used to argue that train surfers have little control over their daily living conditions and therefore exercise control over their body-politic in an attempt to find meaning. By interrogating Edward Soja's (1980:209) "socio-spatial dialectic" and Henri Lefebvre's (1976) theory on space it is established that space is a political, cultural and social construct which meaning can be negotiated by users of space. As such urbanites influence and are influenced by the place(s) and space(s) they inhabit and, therefore, different perceptions and interpretations are attached to these spaces. For this reason perceptions and interpretations of the three spaces inhabited by train surfers are discussed to ascertain whether train surfers function in alienating spaces. In this regard, Marc Augé's (1995) notion of non-place is used to describe township train

stations. To substantiate the argument that urbanites (who inhabit alienating spaces) actively engage with space to reclaim agency, this study draws on Michel de Certeau (1988). De Certeau describes the tactics available to people for reclaiming their own autonomy from pervasive forces and dominant structures such as capitalism, politics and culture. De Certeau is also concerned with how individuals adapt and respond to repressive societies they live in. Based on De Certeau's writings it is argued that train surfing is a spatial practice that allows train surfers to actively engage and change space. Lefebvre's (2002) interpretation of alienation is discussed alongside references to the different types of alienation experienced by train surfers. It is argued that marginalised individuals can resist alienating forces by engaging with place(s) and space(s) in new ways. Here, Guy Debord's (1968) *derive* and Situationalist movement are discussed and parallels are drawn between these activities and train surfing.

1.3   Theoretical framework

The nature of this dissertation is what Rob Shields (2002:4) calls a "cross-disciplinary research problem", as it focuses on various research fields such as "spatiality, everyday life, and globalisation". As such, this cross-disciplinary approach falls in the interstices between Visual Culture Studies, urban studies, spatial phenomenology and performative theory. WJT Mitchell (2002:86) states that Visual Culture should "overcome the veil of familiarity and self-evidence that surrounds the experience of seeing, and turn it into a problem for analysis". Mitchell (2002:88), furthermore, lists the categories of Visual Culture as: "television and digital media ... phenomenological, physiological and cognitive studies of the visual process, sociological studies of spectatorship and display [as well as] visual anthropology". This dissertation incorporates various of the above-mentioned Visual Culture categories through the analysis of television documentaries, digital/Internet videos of train surfing as well as the performative characteristics displayed through the act of train surfing. This study, furthermore, uses the notion that what is seen should be made "accessible to analysis", by interpreting visuals of train surfing (namely train surfing videos). Visual Culture Studies is an appropriate theoretical framework to employ as Nicolas Mirzoeff (1999:3) states: "Visual Culture is concerned

with visual events in which information, meaning or pleasure is sought be the consumer in an interface with technology. By visual technology, I mean any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil painting to television and the Internet". As such, this dissertation explores the spectacle that is train surfing and train surfers' reasons for becoming socially visible.

To resort to cross-disciplinary research entails that these theoretical approaches "render certain aspects of phenomena 'researchable' that are otherwise hard to rigorously observe or analyse" (Shields 2002:4). This research is inevitably a critical reading of the visual spectacle of train surfing that takes place within the wider context of migration and urbanisation and the city's encounter with technology.

The field of Visual Culture Studies forms the broader theoretical framework for this dissertation and it is in particular concerned with the context wherein the visual appears or is experienced. Through its major theorists such as Nicolas Mirzoeff and Mitchell (2002:88), this dissertation focuses on the object of visual studies namely the "visuality" of train surfing. Mirzoeff (1999:4) states that

> the visual is contested, debated and transformed as a constantly challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexual and racialised identities. It is a resolutely interdisciplinary subject.

Mirzoeff (1999:4) also states that Visual Culture's "focus crosses the borders of traditional academic disciplines" and it is "a fluid interpretive structure, centered on understanding the response to visual media of both individuals and groups". As mentioned earlier, train surfing is visually well-documented and in line with Mirzoeff's assertion, the visual documentation thereof is decoded hermeneutically (meaning more interpretatively) and semiotically (more structurally) by the author to establish that train surfing is a spectacle not only visually but also experientially. It is, however, imperative to place the visual within a certain context, as Sarah Pink (2003) states: "a reading of the ... narrative ... goes beyond the visual text itself" (Banks quoted in Pink 2003:186). The socio-economic, spatial and political contexts within which train surfing occurs must

therefore be interrogated to find accurate interpretations of the visual phenomenon that is train surfing.

Another theoretical framework employed by the author is performative theory. Richard Schechner (2002:2) states that "any action that is framed, presented, highlighted, or displayed is a performance". Following this notion, train surfing is read as a performance enacted for spectators. For Schechner (2002:45), performances "whether in performing arts, sports, or everyday life – consist of ritualised gestures and sounds". Train surfing stunts are interpreted as being 'ritualised gestures', and drawing on both Schechner (2002:45) and Judith Butler, train surfing as a performance is read as "twice-behaved, coded, transmittable" behaviour. As Butler (1988:519) states: "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylised repetition of acts*" (emphasis in original). Gender, for Butler, is performed like an act and it is also rehearsed, that is, gender is what one does. Butler (1988:521) asserts that "gender is constructed through specific corporeal acts". Train surfing is a bodily or physical act through which train surfers enact their masculinity. This dissertation briefly explores how train surfers perform and enunciate/embody their constructed masculine identities through analysing their train surfing stunts and the nicknames they choose for themselves.

Through the use of urban studies, the spatial practice of train surfing is investigated as an act that occurs within a certain space where space and technology are appropriated in a specific manner for specific purposes. City space is examined as a form of urban degeneration/alienation; the appropriation of space occurs through the extreme practice of train surfing; and lastly it is argued that the purpose of this action is to seek extreme experiences and move from an alienated position to a de-alienated position.

Concepts pertaining to visual cultural studies, wherein culture is linked to social history and ideological constructs, are briefly included in this dissertation, because culture is a site of resistance and negotiated meanings. As space and contested places are always part

of a politicised debate, it is of utmost importance to explore and analyse the urban landscape as a cultural artefact that fits in the debate of spaces and places that are produced to serve a definite, predetermined role in society.

Not only can spaces/places be interpreted as contested areas, but the body itself can be analysed as a site of contestation. Butler (1993:22) states that

> gender performativity is not a matter of choosing which gender one will be today. Performativity is a matter of reiterating or repeating the norms by which one is constituted ... it is a compulsory repetition of prior and subjectivating norms ... [that] constrain the gendered subject, and which are also the resources from which resistance, subversion, displacement are to be forged.

As such, performative theory is employed to briefly demonstrate how train surfers enact their gender and how they use their bodies to resist dominant (spatial) ideologies and societal constraints.

1.4   Methodological framework

Qualitative research methodology is employed whereby the author tries to come to terms with the phenomenon of train surfing as an extreme spatial practice within its social, cultural and historical context. This is an appropriate research methodology to use in order to start with broader theories regarding the train surfing as spectacle, the influence of capitalism, urbanisation and political ideologies on postmodern city space, as well as the underclass. The social and spatial complexities of train surfing are drawn from the discussion of the main theories. Data collected from non-quantitative methods (secondary reading material) is analysed, and the main conclusions are drawn through inductive and deductive reasoning. Qualitative research also entails that a specific phenomenon or example is studied, thus a critical reading of space and train surfing forms the base of the dissertation. This research is ultimately speculative, exploratory and a personal interpretation of Soweto, train surfing and the marginal figure of the train surfer.

Through the use of the Visual Culture Studies framework, the author is using "a tactic with which to study the genealogy, definition and functions of postmodern everyday life" (Mirzoeff 1999:3). As this dissertation interprets the visuality of train surfing as a

'postmodern' activity/performance, the author draws on Mirzoeff (1999:3) who states that "postmodernism is best imagined and understood visually". Through the analysis of the visuality of train surfing as expressed in *YouTube* videos and television documentaries, the author aims to establish that train surfing is a visually spectacular act that is performed for, and as a response to, the spectators/viewers/watchers of the act.

Lastly, the inclusion of performative theory enables the author to investigate the "processes by which power and visibility have been entwined and allocated to the masculine along with the right to look" (Morris 1995:570). Rosalind Morris (1995:570) states that power and visibility are "historically related positions" and must be scrutinised when genders enact performances, such as train surfing that can be classified as a ritual. According to Morris (1995:571), "performativity theory addresses itself to the lacuna in structuralist explanation, namely the problems of individual agency, historical change, and plurality within systems". Based on Morris' presupposition, the author is able to investigate whether train surfer do indeed experience problems with individual agency and whether these problems are overcome through the act of train surfing.

1.5 Overview of chapters

Chapter Two visually documents the phenomenon of train surfing by analysing *YouTube* videos, two television news reports as well as a documentary of train surfing. Train surfing is divided into a spectacle of the North (Europe) and the South (South Africa and Brazil) based on similarities and differences of so-called train surfing cultures in the two hemispheres. Thereafter, train surfing as a visual spectacle is analysed to establish the relationship between the train surfer and his audience. Train surfing is, lastly, interpreted as a performance that narrates different realities as experienced by train surfers such as their socio-economic circumstances and their personal feelings.

Chapter Three frames the spatial milieu in which train surfing occurs. It offers a historical overview of Johannesburg and differentiation is made between the city as authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct. When the city's authoritarian past is described, reference

is made to various political regimes that have shaped the city's space into a construct that excludes along economical and racial lines. The city as post-authoritarian construct, in turn, highlights concepts such as new urbanism and new forms of spatial control. The focus then shifts to township space where train surfing occurs. Here township space is interpreted as marginal and hybrid space. The argument then turns to the township of Soweto that is read as a place of struggle where township residents actively engage with space to construct meaningful lives.

Chapter Four investigates Johannesburg's urban underclass for it is argued that train surfers are part of this social classification due to their economic position and marginal status. The specific social milieu of train surfers is investigated by referring to the material living conditions experienced in townships like Soweto. These include housing conditions and unemployment, failing family structures, gang culture and threatened masculinities, as well as, drug and alcohol abuse. The historical roots of Soweto's lost generation are traced and it is proposed that the material living conditions of train surfers may lead to the creation of a new lost generation that is fatalistic. In substantiation of the argument that socio-economic factors may contribute to fatalistic practices such as train surfing, correlating socio-economic factors present in Brazil and South Africa are investigated.

Chapter Five positions train surfing as a risk-taking behaviour that is practised by the marginalised to give meaning to their lives. It also explores so-called 'gains' or benefits that risk-taking affords participants. Here reference is made to adolescents' psychological motivations for participating in high risk activities, and it is proposed that another influencing factor that ushers adolescents into risk-taking behaviour is alienating space. To explore whether place(s) and space(s) have an influence on the way urbanites interact with space, Soja's social-spatial dialectic and Lefebvre's analysis of space are investigated. Thereafter, reference is made to the three spaces occupied by train surfers, namely Johannesburg as city space, Soweto as township space and township train stations as non-places. After the short overview of the perceptions of these spaces, train surfing is analysed as a spatial practice as train surfers re-appropriate spaces in an extreme and

subversive manner. Lastly, it is argued that train surfing is an act of resistance. Here reference is made to the different types of alienation experienced by train surfers and it is proposed that train surfing is used as a means of overcoming an estranged, alienated state. Train surfing is, thus, investigated as an agency-giving practice that can restore some degree of agency in the alienated train surfer.

Chapter Six (also the Conclusion) offers a summary of all chapters and highlights the contribution this study has made to Visual Cultural Studies. It furthermore explores the limitations of the study and makes suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER TWO

TRAIN SURFING: A SPECTACLE OF NORTH AND SOUTH

2.1   Introduction

Before any reference can be made in a study like this to the socio-economic, spatial or political background that makes train surfing possible, it is necessary to first establish what train surfing entails. This chapter aims to visually document the phenomenon of train surfing. The visual documentation process entails the analysis of *YouTube* videos of train surfers from around the world, television news reports and a documentary of South African train surfers. The reason for starting with the wider global picture of train surfing (namely Germany, Russia and Brazil) before analysing the local variety thereof in Soweto, Johannesburg is to first establish if there are any similarities or differences between so-called train surfing cultures in the two hemispheres. The reasoning for employing a methodology that establishes a wider (general) framework before focusing on South African train surfers (specific to this study) is that the comparing and contrasting component is more manageable when a wider framework has been established.

In the three German videos (Train surfing in the North) train surfing is interpreted as a solitary act that seems less dangerous in terms of the variety of stunts performed and the three videos also convey mono-simplistic narratives that are distinctly different from the polysemic narratives 'surfed' in the Southern hemisphere. A television news report, *Russia Today* (2010), is used as a cross-over device for linking train surfing in Europe to train surfing in South America (Brazil) and South Africa. *Russia Today* (2010) correlates with Southern hemisphere surfing in terms of the gregarious nature of train surfing in the South, namely surfing in groups, more stunts are performed in both Russia and Southern hemisphere countries, and surfers engage more with the camera/audience. Lastly, a *Sky News* (2006) news report as well as a television documentary, *Special Assignment* (2006), are studied to contextualise train surfing within a South African framework.

Train surfing is, thereafter, scrutinised as an act especially performed for an audience. Here, train surfing as spectacle is studied to establish what the relationship is between the train surfer and his audience (i.e. spectators or video recorder or online viewers of the video). Lastly, train surfing is read as a subversive performance that narrates certain events, feelings, and circumstances as experienced by train surfers. Deductions are made by employing close reading, and narratives explored include living with a terminal disease, surfing to escape one's circumstances and surfing for entertainment.

This chapter makes loosely use of a hermeneutical approach meaning that the cultural meaning of these video documents are interpreted by means of hermeneutical principles such as the fusion of horizons (between the author's perspective and the visuals) and the hermeneutical circle (understanding growing from multiple exposure to the visual texts). It is the aim to come to a better understanding of what these texts may possibly mean in their particular contexts (horizons) and therefore the engagement is further refined through a semiotic decoding of the videos. As no academic research regarding the visuality of train surfing exists, this chapter aims to explore the following areas: what train surfing looks like, the presupposition that train surfers perform their stunts to entertain an audience, and the acting out of spatial narratives. It may mean that initially the discussion focuses solely on describing the activities after which the more interpretive analysis follows.

2.2   Analysis of train surfing videos

This section aims to analyse the visual features of train surfing as it is practiced in the North (Europe) and in the South (Brazil and South Africa). Train surfing in the North examines three train surfing videos from Germany. The first two videos portray the train surfing stunts of a single surfer and the third takes the viewer on a visual tour of Hamburg. A Russian news report serves as a cross-over between the visual elements of train surfing in Europe and train surfing in the South (Brazil and South Africa). Train surfing in the South is introduced with a video from Brazil. Thereafter a news report from

Sky News (2006) and a *Special Assignment* (2006) documentary place the focus on train surfing in Soweto.

2.2.1   Train surfing in the North (Europe): Germany

For this study, three videos produced in Germany were randomly selected from the video sharing website, *YouTube*. These videos typify the visual elements inherent to train surfing in the North, namely that train surfing is a fast paced activity mostly performed by anonymous train surfers. Train surfers in Europe mainly surf trains alone, record their acts with hand-held cameras and 'connect' with their online audience by looking directly at the camera or camera operator. European train surfers also share their train performances with their audience by uploading videos to social networking sites. Train surfing in Europe predominantly concentrates on showing moving trains, surfers performing stunts and passing land- or cityscapes from the train surfers' vantage point on top of trains.

The first video, *Extreme train surfer* (2006), begins with a black screen with the following words: "You can only be free when you have nothing to loose" [sic]. A man is depicted standing on a platform waiting for a train. The camera moves to the left and focuses on a signboard that reads "Hanau HBF". After focusing on the signboard the shot fades into a shot of the man as he runs towards a stationary ICE train, and agilely mounts the back of the train, and then grabs hold of the train's steel handles located on the train's back window. Figure 1 shows the train surfer who fastens a rope or cable cord on one of the handles. After securing his rope the train surfer lifts his arm triumphantly and waves at the camera.

A black screen appears with the words "Let's surf!" The video sequence that follows the black screen consists of a series of hand-held shots wherein the train surfer films himself. Erratic camera movements depict the train surfer lying flat on his back on the train's back window with gusts of wind tugging at his hooded sweater, pants and his bandana covering his mouth.

Figure 1: Video still, *Extreme train surfer*, 2006.
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VZvm5H4F-aA).

The sequence also shows how the train moves past railway tracks, other trains and the surrounding countryside at frightening speed. When compared to train surfing videos of surfers in Brazil and South Africa, the German train surfer does not perform a variety of train surfing stunts in this video. The hand-held shots depict the train surfer lying on top of the train's back window, standing up and holding on to a rope/cable cord fastened to one of the train's handles and how the overhead bridges fly past as the train moves along its tracks.

In the middle of the video various shots are edited into a sequence where the train surfer looks directly into the camera. Thereafter the camera focuses on the railway tracks and the train comes to a standstill. On the platform, the train surfer films his shadow as he jumps off the train and walks across the platform, thereafter the screen fades to black. The words "1 Year after the rides" appear on a black screen that fades into "He died from leukaemia". This is followed by a shot of a tombstone covered by a black jacket embroidered with the word "Trainrider". The shot fades into an image depicting the closing doors of a train followed by yet another black screen with the words "Rest in peace 1985 – 2006".

Video 1 can be interpreted as a short film in which verbal text is used as signposts to guide the viewer. Without the various black screens with superimposed words, the meaning of the video would be lost. The video begins with a textual clue, a short assertion, which clearly hints at the fatalistic undertone of the video. At the beginning of the video, the viewer cannot interpret this assertion fully, but at the end of the video, the words on the black screen make the meaning explicit: this train surfer was terminally ill with leukaemia and he had nothing to lose by train surfing as he was going to die eventually.

From the onset the location where the video was filmed is unclear. Only after the camera focuses on the signboard, does the video take on a specific context. The signboard acts to contextualise the video, but audiences unfamiliar with this name, have to do research in order to establish that Hanau is a town located 25 kilometres east of Frankfurt, Germany. When the train surfer mounts the train, his agility suggests that this is not his first attempt at train surfing. He knows exactly what to do and how to tie his safety cord around the train's handles. The speed with which he ties the knot also shows that he is not an amateur.

The longest part of the video is comprised of footage taken by the train surfer. This part seems to be made up of different journeys that have been edited together and each new journey is separated by a fading black screen. The 'journey' segment of the video has some striking features. Firstly, the frightening speed at which the train moves and the chaotic camera movements create an uneasy feeling in the viewer.[1] The landscape that rushes by and the way the wind tugs at the train surfer's clothing are signifiers of the strength of the elements (wind and force). These visual cues also evoke an anxious feeling in the viewer, as the viewer realises that train surfing is both a dangerous and high risk activity. The train surfer may be killed at any moment and the viewer is left in a position where he/she anticipates the moment when something might go awry. The journey segment does not contain an elaborate repertoire of train surfing moves. The lack

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[1] ICE trains in Germany have a top speed of approximately 280 kilometres per hour (*European Rail Guide* 2010:[sp]).

of various moves places the emphasis on the enormous speed at which the train travels and the level of danger to which the train surfer exposes himself. Although the train surfer looks triumphantly at the camera and shows that he can balance himself with one hand, his 'dangerous' moves are dwarfed by the power of the elements.

The final segment depicts how the train slows down and pulls into a station. The train surfer films his shadow as he leisurely strolls across the platform after his surfing journey.[2] This act of walking away from the train signifies that the train surfer has successfully completed and survived his journey. The scene fades away into a black screen with words that signal a year has passed and "he has died of leukaemia". The viewer associates the third person pronoun, "he", with the train surfer and this conclusion is substantiated when a close-up shot of a black jacket with the words, "Trainrider", appears on screen. As the camera zooms out it becomes clear that the jacket covers a tombstone in a graveyard and the jacket obscures the true identity of the train surfer. Throughout the video the identity of the train surfer remains anonymous. The closing train doors at the end of the video also signify the end of a chapter, the end of a life, and a journey that has come to an end.

The second video, *Train surfing Germany* (2006), was selected not because it depicts the same subject matter as in video 1, but because it unlocks the identity of the "Trainrider" shown in the first video. *Train surfing Germany* (2006) starts with a German news anchor (newsreader) who introduces the video clip. The news report states that Stephan Schwartz is a train surfer who participated in the most extreme form of "*Bahn* surfing".[3] The following segment shows Schwartz standing on a bridge looking down at trains and he shows the camera a 'thumbs up' sign.

The bulk of the video portrays Schwartz's train surfing stunts: running on the roofs of moving trains and climbing between the carriages. In another scene Schwartz is filmed

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[2] The camera shot of the train surfer's shadow can also be interpreted as a premonition of his imminent death.
[3] *Bahn* is German for train or railway. In this context *Bahn* surfing is interpreted as train surfing.

from behind, his black jacket with the words "Trainrider" clearly visible.[4] Thereafter Schwartz is shown as he disembarks from a train, runs from a uniformed man and hangs from the front of the train. The uniformed man walks to the front of the train, Schwartz looks at him and jumps from the train onto the platform.

Another scene shows how Schwartz stands on the outside railing of a train, flapping his arms like a bird. The sequence that follows consists of various long shots, medium shots, hand-held camera shots and shots taken from oblique angles. The sequence following this chaotically edited scene consists of shots that are longer in length (time) and which are more fluid: they depict railway tracks and stationary trains. A low angle shot, where the video camera is placed on the railway tracks, shows how a train passes by, and to the right of the screen the viewer sees how Schwartz strolls along the train tracks. Video 2 ends in the same manner as video 1: Schwartz's black jacket covers his tombstone and this image fades into a scene where train doors slowly close.

Train surfing Germany (2006) uses virtually the same video segments that were used in *Extreme train surfer* (2006). The main differences, however, are that the black screens that guide the viewer in video 1 have been removed and sound effects were added to the video. It is also unknown whether the full video clip was broadcast on German television or if the creator of the video clip merely added the news anchor segment to lend credibility to his/her video. One might argue that the inclusion of the news reader adds credibility or newsworthiness to the train surfing phenomenon in Europe. Due to the inclusion of the news clip, the once anonymous train surfer, as depicted in video 1, now has a name – Stephan Schwartz. Another addition to video 2 is a music track by Enya. The serene sound effects, however, stand in stark contrast to the extremely dangerous images portrayed on screen. Another interpretation of the serene music is that it might hint at the fact that Schwartz is now resting in peace, or that the music is appropriate to accompany a visual eulogy.

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[4] After watching the first video the viewer deduces from the second video's scenes and the jacket's words that the anonymous train surfer in video 1 is in fact Stephan Schwartz.

As in video 1, there are few displays of actual train surfing stunts. Noteworthy visual elements portrayed in video 2 are: Schwartz waving at and making the 'thumbs up' sign to the camera or perhaps to onlookers; Schwartz flapping his arms like a bird; and Schwartz's casual evasion of the uniformed man at the train station. The gestures of waving and showing a 'thumbs up' sign connote that the train surfer is showing his audience that he is alright and perhaps that he is enjoying his stunts. The mimicking of a bird's flight can be read as Schwartz showing his audience that he is as 'free as a bird' because birds are associated with freedom. When Schwartz evades the uniformed man, he casually glances over his shoulder and looks back at the man standing on the platform. This gesture can be interpreted as arrogant or smug and it portrays how blasé the train surfer is. It can also be read as an extension of the train surfer's fearlessness: he is not afraid of surfing on top of trains nor is he scared of being apprehended by railway officials.

Since a great deal of footage in both video 1 and video 2 are identical, the bulk of video 2 also depicts landscapes, highways, other trains shown from the train surfer's point of view and this footage offers a new visual perspective of the city and forests. Added visual depth in video 2 is provided through oblique camera angles, long shots and low angle shots. The oblique camera shots suggest imbalance, transition and instability. These also show that the viewer shares the train surfer's point of view, and the camera becomes the 'eyes' of the train surfer. The low angle shot used on the railway tracks evokes a sense of fear and insecurity in the viewer. The viewer might also be confused and disorientated by the shot as it lacks detail and only the sky and trees form the shot's background. It is, furthermore, not clear whether the train surfer is lying on the tracks and if this is his point of view depicted on screen. The viewer feels as if he/she is on the railway tracks, stationary, not able to move and waiting for the inevitable to happen: a train will rush over the tracks and kill the person lying on it. When the train surfer appears in the frame (to the right) and strides past, the emotion of triumph once again surfaces, and the train surfer might be seen as the victor: he did not die on the tracks, he survived his stunt.

The first two videos focus predominantly on the solitary train surfing acts of an individual surfer. He engages with his audience by gesturing and looking directly at the camera. Although the scenery, train stations and place names contextualise the videos, the cityscapes and other surroundings are eclipsed by the train surfer's stunts. To highlight another characteristic of train surfing in the North, a third video is analysed that portrays the train surfer's engagement with both technology (the train) and scenery (cityscapes).

Hamburg city surfing (2007), consists of fast-paced images of train surfing shown to the sound of upbeat drum and bass music. The video begins with a first person point of view (hand-held camera) of train tracks and a train that speeds by. The following scenes show a train surfer kneeling and standing on top of a train, a train moving into a station, and a surfer holding onto the train's wiper blades. The music suddenly slows down and train tracks are shown in slow motion to coincide with the music. The next sequence of images is shown in quicker succession to coincide with the music's heightened pace. Erratic hand-held shots taken from a moving train's roof show the back of the train, passing streets, buildings and railway tracks. Figure 2 illustrates the vantage point of the train surfer: the viewer sees the train tracks through the eyes of the surfer.

Figure 2: Video still, *Hamburg city surfing*, 2007.
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fRpmErdOosQ).

This visual sequence of oblique, tilted hand-held shots disorientate the viewer. The viewer is unsure if the train surfer has lost his grip as the camera does not focus on a

specific object. The train then pulls into a station and the viewer sees how the train surfer jumps from the train. The last part of the video consists of lengthy pan shots (left and right) where the camera operator films a passing train carrying army tanks.

Video 3 can be read as a visual tour of the city as seen from the train surfer's perspective. Very few train surfing stunts are depicted in the video and there are no real 'story' elements. Since there are no textual references to who the train surfer is, it is difficult to contextualise the video or for the viewer to read a clear narrative of it. The name of the video, *Hamburg city surfing* (2007), does specify the place where the video was created, but the creator of the video does not include any other form of contextualisation. Video 3 can, therefore, be interpreted as a sensory tour of Hamburg from the vantage point of a train surfer. In this video train surfing is again depicted as a fast-paced activity, due to the upbeat music used, the erratically edited video clips and the strange camera angles used to film the city, its streets, parks, trains, train tracks, and train stations. The oblique camera angles also suggest that this activity is strange and not 'normal', and therefore requires innovative camera shots (from the train surfer's point of view) to illustrate to the viewer what train surfing really entails.

No special effects are used in the video and it consists of uncensored, raw camera footage that has been edited into a short film. The uncensored nature of the footage creates a visual text that portrays real-life events. The on-screen events are unpredictable and evoke a heightened sense of anxiety and anticipation in the viewer: just as the train surfer never knows when he might loose his grip, so does the audience never know when the unthinkable might happen on screen. This dilemma in which the viewer finds himself almost becomes an adrenaline rush: will the footage become more dangerous, will the train surfer be killed or what is going to be shown next? The creator of the video – and perhaps the train surfer – knows that the viewer must be kept spellbound and the show must continue long enough to satisfy the audience's curiosity.

To summarise, the three analysed videos illustrate the visual characteristics of train surfing in the North. There are four main features. Firstly, train surfing is a solitary

spatial performance acted out by anonymous individuals. The activity is, secondly, portrayed as a dangerous and precarious act that is performed for the camera. Thirdly, although the repertoire of stunts is limited, the use of camera angles and handheld shots make the footage seem frighteningly real. And lastly, the inclusion of cityscapes, forests, passing trains and train stations typify that train surfing in the North is about the engagement with technology (the train) as well as with the spaces and places the train surfer travels to. Train surfing in the North, as portrayed in these videos, is thus the visual and physical interaction with trains and space.

The news report regarding train surfing in Russia serves as a link between surfing in Europe and the Southern hemisphere. Although Russia is part of Europe, the train surfing stunts and styles used there are more in line with Southern hemisphere surfing.

2.2.2 Cross-over: train surfing in Russia

Video 4, *Russia Today* (2010), is a news clip from the news channel, *Russia Today*. The content of the video is introduced by a female newsreader who states that train surfing is a new craze in Russia. Jacob Greeves, a journalist for *Russia Today*, interviews the train surfers and narrates the video. Greeves states that train surfing is becoming more popular in Russia because youngsters view train surfing as an "adrenaline rush" (*Russia Today* 2010). Evidence that train surfing is a fad in Russia is supplied by Greeves who states: "[this] craze has swept across Moscow with the Web swelling with uploaded videos" (*Russia Today* 2010). Greeves, furthermore, explicitly points out that there are many risks involved, such as "3000 volts of electricity" as well as "falling from the train and being crushed" (*Russia Today* 2010). It is also stated that train surfing is merely a "hobby" which gives adolescents an "unbridled escape from reality" (*Russia Today* 2010).

Following the introductory segment, two train surfers are interviewed by Greeves. Sergey Zaitsev states that his 'group' only rides train and does not pull "any crazy stunts" (*Russia Today* 2010). To him, train surfing is "just a hobby that gets our adrenaline up" (*Russia Today* 2010). Greeves then states that train surfing is a "form of expression" for

Russia's youth (*Russia Today* 2010). The second train surfer, Andrey Malyshev, compares train surfing to sky-diving and mountain climbing. He states that his group of train surfers follows safety guidelines, but he also admits that the activity "can have tragic consequences" (*Russia Today* 2010). From this statement it is clear that Malyshev is not oblivious to the fact that he and his fellow train surfers might be killed.

Some of the train surfing stunts shown in the video include a crowd of approximately eight youngsters scrambling to get on to the back of a stationary train. In this group a young red-haired girl is seen sitting on top of a moving train with three boys. One of the boys holds a camera and gets ready to take a photograph. In another scene a train surfer is seen holding onto the outside railing of a train with his one hand while he clutches a video in the other. In a scene around the 1:58 mark, a group of eight train surfers is shown sitting casually on top of a moving train. One person is lying on his back, feet crossed, seemingly unmoved by the speed at which the train travels. In the last scene three young men are seen holding onto the outside railings of a train while waving nonchalantly at the camera. Figure 3, a video still from the last segment, also depicts a crowd of train surfers on top of a train.

Figure 3: Video still, *Russia Today*, 2010.
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOuUGZ-_yrE).

While one can assume Russian train surfers also do extremely dangerous stunts, the video produced by *Russia Today* only includes the seemingly 'tame' stunts of mounting a stationary train, holding onto the back of a train and lying on top of the roofs of trains.[5] The lack of extreme train surfing stunts is, thus, evident in the video. This might be attributed to the journalist's or news channel's objections to including footage of extremely dangerous stunts because it might sensationalise the activity even more.

Russian train surfing, thus, exhibits three of the features inherent to surfing in the North. Train surfing footage of Russian surfers and their German counterparts is 'less' elaborate than train surfing in the South; both Russian and German train surfers engage with city space; and the surfers portrayed in videos 1 to 4 perform their stunts for the camera and/or an audience. There are, however, two features that link Russian surfers with surfers in the South: train surfers surf in groups and one of the impetuses of train surfing is to escape their harsh daily realities. The next section focuses on train surfing in the South and the two above-mentioned characteristics are explored in detail.

2.2.3   Train surfing in the South: Brazil and South Africa

Video 5, *Train surfing Brazil* (2006), is shown on the website nothingtoxic.com. The location where the video was filmed is explicitly stated in the title and other visual clues – the apartment buildings, mountains and the race of the train surfers – confirm that these young train surfers are South American. An American voice artist narrates the video: "train surfing ... last time we checked there were not many career opportunities in train surfing ... and oh yeah, there is another downside, a lot of these dudes end up dead" (*Train surfing Brazil* 2006).

In video 5 more train surfing moves are displayed when compared to the number of moves observed in videos 1 to 4. In the opening scene a group of approximately seven

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[5] The train surfing stunts portrayed in *Russia Today* seem 'tame' when compared to the daredevil stunts showcased in train surfing videos produced in Brazil and South Africa. This also correlates with the assertion that train surfing stunts in the North are not as dangerous as the stunts performed by train surfers in the South.

boys are seen sitting and standing on top of a moving train. The next scene shows two men standing behind one another on top of the train. They are slightly hunched forward as they rhythmically bend their bodies lower to evade the approaching overhead cables and pylons. In another scene, a train surfer is observed lying flat on his back on the roof of a coach; he smiles and looks directly at the camera. His right hand firmly grips onto the roof and his left hand holds onto his cap. He crosses his legs, scrambles from his lying position into a crouching position and moves from the side of the train to the middle portion of the coach's roof. The shot is followed by two train surfers who are squatting together on the train's roof. As overhead cables approach, the one train surfer guides the one sitting in front of him to bend down. The next shot is of a boy who is standing, bent forward, legs spread apart mimicking the stance of a 'wave surfer'. His right hand holds onto the train's roof, while his left hand mimics how a 'normal' surfer would paddle water. The last shot is of a bare-chested man holding onto the side of a train, his left hand firmly grips the train's roof while his right hand gestures at the platform and various onlookers.

Although video 5 is a very short clip, it contains various awe-inspiring train surfing moves. Video 5 mainly consists of hand-held shots filmed by a camera operator. One can assume a fellow train surfer was tasked with filming the train surfing 'gang' while they performed their stunts. The train surfer's reason for making this video is unclear, but one can argue that the video production's main purpose is to distribute the video to young adults. The train surfers clearly wanted to document their dare-devil stunts to entertain and perhaps shock their audience.

It is, furthermore, assumed that the American voice-over track was added to the video after the video was distributed or posted on the Internet. It is highly unlikely that the train surfers made the voice-over track, as its tone is mocking and sarcastic. It is unthinkable that the train surfers would have commented in such a manner on their own stunts. In this light, one can also deduce that the train surfers filmed this video to showcase their bravery, showmanship and unique surfing skills. The dubbed-over verbal text contradicts the visual text; whereas the visual text is fast-paced and full of energy to evoke sensations

of excitability, awe and scintillation, the verbal text is ironic, mocking and condescending.

It is ironic that young men in Brazil do not have job opportunities and they instead train surf in order to escape their monotonous existence.[6] The train surfers do not need to be reminded of the fact that their future prospects are bleak. They know that there are no career opportunities in train surfing and the likelihood that they might be killed is very high. The narrator uses slang language such as "yeah", "dudes", "ends up dead" to further demean the train surfers' (believed-to-be) 'brave' acts. For the narrator there is nothing brave about train surfing: train surfing will not equip these young men for future careers and death seems a likely outcome of this dangerous game.

Train surfing in Brazil, as shown in video 5, contains similar features characteristic to surfing in the South. Train surfing occurs in harsh circumstances, it is practiced by young boys and unemployed adolescents, the moves are very daring, the activity is performed in groups, and lastly, train surfing is acted out for an audience. Rogerio Reis' *Surfistas de Trem (Train Surfers)* (Figure 4) captures two traits of train surfing in the South.

Figure 4: Rogerio Reis, *Surfistas de Trem (Train Surfers)*, 1995.
Gelatin silver print, 30.5 x 40.6 cm.
(http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3101/2892928056_5d7390af4d_o.jpg).

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[6] See Chapter 4, section 4.6, Train surfing in Brazil and South Africa: a brief comparison.

The two men shown in the foreground visually dominate the image, thus, portraying train surfing as a spectacular activity. The overhead cables imprinted against the pale sky connote danger, therefore highlighting that train surfing is perilous.

As this study focuses on train surfing in South Africa, the argument now turns to two videos of train surfers in Soweto. These videos will further explore the above-mentioned characteristics of train surfing in the Southern hemisphere.

Video 6 is a short television news story produced by *Sky News* (2006). Emma Hertz, a journalist, places the focus on Soweto's train surfers, their reasons for participating in this activity, and the dangers associated with train surfing. Not only does the video incorporate train surfers' opinions regarding this dangerous activity, it also visually documents extreme train surfing stunts better than in the previous videos (numbers 1-4).

Soweto's train surfers are seen doing the following stunts: climbing through a carriage's window to get onto the train's roof; walking, lying and running on the roofs of trains; ducking and dodging overhead cables and pylons; dancing on top of a train's roof (their 'dance' consists of jumping up and down, their feet tapping the roof, their hands waving, and making strange gestures); hanging onto the outside railings of a carriage door, swinging from side to side; and jumping back and forth through an open carriage door while holding onto a pole in the carriage (the train surfer jumps onto the platform and back again into the train). Figure 5 shows this train surfer holding onto the floor of a carriage, feet dangling on the outside of the train and as his feet make contact with the ground, he 'runs' alongside the train. Hertz states that any type of stunt is permitted in train surfing "as long as it is reckless" (*Sky News* 2006).

Figure 5: Video still, *Sky News*, 2006.
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ehzB-qml88).

As in the train surfing videos shot in Russia and Brazil, train surfing in Soweto is depicted as a 'social' activity. In video 6 – around the 0:55 minute mark – a train surfing gang of eight men is seen gathered in an open *veld*[7] smoking drugs, and in another scene seven train surfers are seen surfing on top of a moving train. These visuals and Hertz's statement that train surfers operate in train surfing gangs depict train surfing as a gregarious practice. Although stunts are performed individually, throughout the video groups of train surfers are either shown surfing on top of trains or while in carriages, performing stunts through open carriage doors.

The next example of train surfing in South Africa is based on *Special Assignment* (2006), a documentary that focuses on train surfing in Soweto. Figure 6 depicts the opening scene that is shot against a powder blue sky with the figure of a train surfer etched in the foreground. The haunting music that accompanies the visuals lends an ethereal feeling to the scene. The train surfer stands on top of a moving train, swaying in unison with the train's rhythmic motion. His arms are horizontally stretched out and he leans backwards, in a limbo dance motion, to avoid making contact with the overhead cables and pylons. The train surfer's lithe actions suggest that he is unhesitant, experienced and that he knows exactly at which moment to sit on his haunches to evade the oncoming bridge.

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[7] *Veld* is an Afrikaans word for bushes or an open piece of land.

Figure 6: Video still, *Special Assignment*, 2006.

This train surfer also exhibits another way to avoid cables: he does one-handed push-ups on the roof of the train to avoid the overhead pylons. This sequence of stunts is shot from a low angle and the train surfer, the sky and the overhead cables dominate the screen. The subject (train surfer) is visually depicted as in control of the scene, and the subject is read as being potent, domineering and powerful. There is, furthermore, visual symbiosis between the train surfer and the train. The train surfer looks as if he is an extension of the train, a figure protruding from the train's roof, swaying back and forth with the train's motions.

There is also a stark contrast in colour in the opening scene. The dark figure on a blue background is a powerful image and the identity of the surfer is hidden. This specific use of colour results in the creation of an anonymous, generalised and perhaps universal depiction of train surfers: a lone figure engaging with the space on top, alongside and underneath a train. The following scene, as depicted in Figure 7, shows the anonymous train surfer hanging onto the brim of a train's roof, his body vertical with carriage. While the surfer holds onto the roof with one hand, he runs on the carriage's side. He then slides through the carriage window and this signals that his stunt has come to an end.

Figure 7: Video still, *Special Assignment*, 2006.

Another scene makes use of a high angle shot portraying a man (most likely a train surfer) standing on train tracks. His legs are spread apart and his arms are held out vertically. This man is playing 'chicken,' a kamikaze-like move, with an oncoming train. When the train is a few metres away, the man runs from the tracks and eludes death. This scene can be interpreted as a display of bravery or perhaps the execution of a 'dare' or challenge. The high angle shot depicts the train surfer as small and insignificant in comparison to the approaching train. The viewer might also interpret this scene as a display of the extreme measures train surfers are willing to take to display their bravery or as a means to surpass their peers' stunts.

After the spectacular visuals of train surfing stunts, the narrator, Brian Ndevu, introduces the viewer to three train surfers: Prince Shiba a.k.a. Bitch Nigga, Lefa Mzimela a.k.a. Gatjeni, and Tshepiso Ntohla (also spelt Ntuhla) a.k.a. Mzembe. The rest of the documentary chronicles the stories of these three surfers.

Throughout video 7 men and women are depicted in stereotypical gender-based roles. The mothers of Ntohla, Shiba and Mzimela are shown in spaces normally associated with domesticity: at home or in the kitchen preparing food. Mzimela's girlfriend is also shown

in her bedroom that is adorned with objects such as love poems, red and pink roses and a teddy bear. These four women are depicted as passive subjects who are worried about their sons or their boyfriend. The focus is also on single-parent households where the mother must provide for her family. Examples hereof are Mrs. Ntohla's husband who killed himself and Mrs. Mzimela's husband who left her for another woman. Mrs. Ntohla also has to take care of her deceased sister's two children. The inclusion of such detail depicts the video's female figures as forsaken and seemingly fragile. The overall mother figure, in video 7, is also powerless. They are at their wits' end: they have tried talking to their sons about stopping to train surf, but their sons do not heed their advice. Mzimela's girlfriend, Nhlanhla, is in an abusive relationship and subjected to gender-based violence. She says, "even though he beats me, I still love him ... my friends always tell me to leave him, but I cannot" (*Special Assignment* 2006). This statement solidifies the idea that the women in video 7 are passive subjects who are dominated by either their sons or by a boyfriend.

On the other hand, the men or train surfers are depicted as active agents. They are filmed in locations other than home, thus, locations that can be associated with masculinity. These locations include train stations, the open *veld*, the *shebeen*, while they are playing pool, surfing trains, loitering in the streets of Soweto and Joubert Park, and verbally harassing girls.[8] Train surfing is also portrayed as an activity that one would engage in to attract girls. Train surfing is thus seen as a masculine activity that one would use to obtain the admiration of girls. The masculine persona is furthered through the notion that the train surfers idolise father figures. Nhlanhla says Mzimela is proud of his abusive father; and Ntohla says his father was not a drunk who committed suicide – he was a part of MK and (accidentally) killed himself with a hand-grenade.[9]

Video 7 is also the only video that explicitly terms various train surfing moves and gives a short 'history' of how the move was invented. The overarching term for all train surfing

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[8] *Shebeen* is the colloquial term for a bar or a pub.
[9] Here Ntohla uses the colloquial term, MK, when referring to *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the ANC's armed wing that recruited freedom fighters in the struggle against apartheid. *Umkhonto we Sizwe* literally means spear of the nation.

stunts is "the Spiderman" (*Special Assignment* 2006). The viewer knows that Spiderman is a comic book character with magical abilities to climb objects like a spider. From the footage it is easy to see the similarities between Soweto's train surfers and this comic book hero. Train surfers scale the carriages with ease, they are nimble when they have to evade cables and their bodies look like they are made from flexible plastic that can bend in any direction. The text in Figure 8 illustrates that train surfers are overtly confident and believe that their nimble (and perhaps intuitive) movements, rather than their sight, will ensure that they will dodge pylons, cables and bridges.

Not only does video 7 provide the viewer with train surfing 'terminology,' it also contains narratives that contextualise this phenomenon. Bitch Nigga (Shiba) is portrayed as the most experienced train surfer. He starts his stunt with a "warm-up run" on the platform, jumps into a carriage at the end of the platform, and climbs through the carriage's window to perform his stunts on the train's roof (*Special Assignment* 2006). Shiba's favourite style is *viva la raza* and entails surfing on a train's roof, performing a

Figure 8: Video still, *Special Assignment*, 2006.

limbo-dance to dodge pylons and cables. He states that this style of ducking cables was created when he was drunk on vodka and it imitates the wrestling style of Eddie Guerro. Jamie-James Medina's photograph (Figure 9) as well as Figure 10, shows another train

surfing move that is featured in video 7, namely 'the bullet' – running alongside a moving train.

Figure 9: Jamie-James Medina, *Godfather performs 'the bullet'*, 2008.
(http://farm4.static.flickr.com/3094/2892822838_e9f89f2ffa_o.jpg).

It is, however, Shiba's stunt of surfing underneath a moving train that made him famous. When Shiba's student, Mzimela, performs this stunt, the camera focuses on the wheels of the train, the facial expressions of the surfer, and how the surfer clings onto the metal rods of the train. The close-up shots of the train and the surfer seem to bring the danger closer to the viewer. It furthermore intensifies both the moment as well as the viewer's experience of this extremely dangerous stunt. Mzimela also likes to perform *begos* or surfing backwards on top of a train (*Special Assignment* 2006). He states that he has calculated the distances between the pylons and cables, and therefore, knows when to duck. Mzimela, furthermore, states that only an experienced surfer would be able to perform this stunt, and emphasises that he surfs daily. Another interesting fact is that

Mzimela points out other people think he uses *muti*[10] to successfully accomplish his surfing moves. Here Mzimela stresses how good he is – people in the township think he must use black magic to perform such incredible stunts.

Figure 10: The 'bullet' performed, Sa.
(http://images.lightstalkers.org/images/290407/light03.jpg).

It is also alluded that train surfing is a 'skill' that can be passed down from a master to a scholar. Shiba states that Mzimela is his best student and that he would give him a gold medal, Innocent (another surfer) would be given a silver medal, and he would give himself a platinum medal. In this context, the use of words such as 'student' and 'master' contribute to the idea that train surfing is 'sacred' knowledge or a tradition that must be passed from one generation to the next.

When compared to videos 1-4, videos 5, 6 and 7 exhibit the most train surfing moves. Other similarities between videos 5, 6 and 7 are that train surfers surf in groups or gangs

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[10] *Muti* refers to traditional African medicine that is given to a person by either a *sangoma* or an *inyanga* (a diviner or traditional healer). It is also believed that *muti* can have miraculous effects on the user such as equipping the person with supernatural powers or healing a sick person quickly.

and that onlookers/spectators are present to witness train surfing stunts. Videos 6 and 7 also cover the reasons why Soweto's youth resort to train surfing, namely poverty, boredom, alcohol abuse and broken family structures. When analysing the seven videos it becomes clear that the train surfers engage with their audience in all the videos by making eye-contact as well as waving or gesturing at onlookers. This can be interpreted as a sign that train surfers want to be watched, observed and admired while they are performing their stunts. In light of this finding, the next section explores train surfing as a performance or spectacle that is aimed at a specific audience.

2.3   Train surfing as spectacle

This section systematically details how train surfing can be read as a performance, spectacle or show aimed at an audience, and how the spectacle is depicted in all seven videos.

In both videos 1 and 2 the train surfer, Stephan Schwartz, looks directly at the camera, thus directly at the audience. He looks directly at the audience as he train surfs to signal that he is triumphant. This direct gaze into the camera seems to challenge the audience – it is almost as if the train surfer challenges or 'dares' the viewer to accomplish what he has accomplished. This video serves as a form of remembrance because the train surfer has died and the video serves as a visual documentation that he has lived.

Video 3 puts on a show for the viewer: it takes the viewer on a different 'sight-seeing' tour of Hamburg. It does not show any historical buildings, but it offers the viewer a new way of looking and experiencing the city. It shows the viewer that this is how one lives the city when you are a train surfer. Both the visuals and music are speeded up signalling that the fast-paced city can be lived even faster when you are on top of a moving train. In this video the train surfer saps the energy of the city and shows his audience how fast life can be lived. The train surfer tries to create a visual show for his audience – he tries to film everything he sees and does from his perspective and he invites the viewer to become him while watching the video.

Video 4, *Russia Today* (2010), depicts various groups of train surfers clinging onto trains. Although the stunts in this video are not as dramatic as some of the stunts performed by the Brazilian train surfers, there are similarities. In video 4 as in video 5 (Brazilian surfers), most of the train surfers directly look at the camera. This video has three visual examples and one verbal cue that hint at the use of technology to capture the train surfers' stunts. The three visual examples are: one young man on top of the moving train has a camera in hand and gets ready to take a photograph, his friend sitting next to him also turns and waves at the crowd or train commuters on the platform. This scene indicates that the 'photographer' wants to document his train surfing adventure and that his friend wants to attract the attention of the crowd. Secondly, another surfer holding onto the back of a metro train has a video camera in hand, and this clearly suggests his intent to make a video of his train surfing journey. And in the last scene three train surfers, clinging onto the back of a train, turn, look and wave at the camera. The verbal hint is given by Greeves who states that the "Web [is] swelling with uploaded videos" (*Russia Today* 2010). This example illustrates that Russian train surfers are acutely aware of the performance aspect of train surfing. It can be deduced that not only do Russian train surfers participate in this high-risk activity to get an adrenaline rush, they also want to record their escapades and distribute photographs and videos of what they have accomplished on the Internet.

In video 5 it is evident that the group of Brazilian train surfers acts and performs for the camera that films their moves. The train surfer with the blue cap lies flat on his back, looks directly at the camera, smiles and scrambles into a hunched position. He clearly wanted to show this trick for his audience while the camera was pointed at him. The bare-chested train surfer, in the last scene of the video, performs his stunt of holding onto the outside railings of a train for the onlookers on the platform. He looks in the direction of the onlookers and waves his arm and hand at them, clearly as a sign to attract their attention.

The assertion that train surfing is an act performed for the purpose of entertaining an audience is verbally and visually substantiated in the *Sky News* (2006) news report, video

6. During the course of the video, Hertz states that train surfing passes as "entertainment in Soweto". Train surfer 1, Kabelo, says that "some boys do it to impress the girls, but to us, we take it as a game ... we play it for ourselves". And train surfer 2, Thabang, states that "we do it to entertain other people". These three quotations corroborate the theory that train surfing is indeed an act, game or performance staged to entertain onlookers. The audiovisual evidence that train surfing can be regarded as a spectacle is introduced by the sound of the screaming and cheering crowd that can be heard around the 2:16 and 3:00 minute mark. The sound of the cheering crowd seems to energise the train surfers, because their dancing stunts become more reckless to impress the crowd. Hertz, furthermore, emphasises that train surfing gang members challenge one another to take bigger risks. This underlines the fact that train surfers 'show-off' their repertoire, not only to the cheering crowd, but also to their peers. The 'show' must be bigger and better, and train surfers will take bigger risks to surpass their fellow surfers.

Additional visual and verbal corroboration of the theory that train surfing is a spectacle or a visual display to entertain is found in video 7. Shiba states that he always wanted to be a "stuntman" (*Special Assignment* 2006). His word choice denotes a person whose career entails performing dangerous stunts for movies, television programmes and theatre productions. It can also connote performing stunts in a circus for the sake of entertainment. Stunts can also be associated with risks, danger and injuries. Shiba furthermore states that he loves entertaining and that many train surfers "copied" his moves (*Special Assignment* 2006). The fact that young train surfers imitate Shiba's moves indicates that his train surfing style was desirable, attractive, and enviable.

The entertainment factor inherent to train surfing is also emphasised by Shiba's choice of nickname, namely Bitch Nigga, and his clothing style. Shiba decided to dress in black, with black boots and a black coat to imitate characters from the *Matrix*. Shiba states, "no one knew me. I had to show people who I was ... it became a spectacle. Everyone wanted to see what I would do next. Kids would bunk school to see me surf" (*Special Assignment* 2006). This quotation clearly verifies the argument that train surfing is in fact an act or spectacle performed to please young train surfers, their peers or spectators (the crowd

watching on a platform or the audience watching a train surfing video). Figure 11 also captures this element: the train surfer, Tupac, looks directly at the camera while he clings onto a train.

Figure 11: Tupac, the train surfer, Sa.
(http://gurn.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/tupac-sanza-hanza2.jpg).

Here, the metaphor of a circus act is applicable. In this regard, the author would like to elaborate on the metaphor of the circus as a historical predecessor of train surfing. Andrew Darley (2000:39) traces the origins of the circus and states that the circus was born out of "the great fairs of seventeenth-century Europe". Darley (2000:39) elaborates that Philip Astley was the founder of the circus as he brought popular amusement and performances together in "fixed exhibition sites". Astley's first circus, *Cirque-Olimpique*, was opened in Paris in 1782 and combined equestrian acts, acrobats, clowns, strong-men, balancing acts and animal trainers: all the elements that ensured crowds flocked to his spectacle (Darley 2000:39).

Certain parallels can be drawn between the historical circus and train surfing. Firstly, whereas the circus is a fixed exhibition site, train surfing is a moving exhibition site. Train surfing is a site of both physical and symbolical transition and exhibition. Physical exhibition/transition because the train surfers exhibit their stunts while moving or being in transit between train stations; and symbolical exhibition/transition because train surfing connotes an initiation rite – the transition between two stages, that of being socially invisible to becoming socially visible and being seen. The second parallel is that an attraction is exhibited. In the historical circus various acts were showcased, but in train surfing there is only one attraction: the train surfer performing his stunts on moving trains. The last similarity is that both the historical circus and train surfing is regarded as a spectacle. Darley (2000:40) states that in the circus as spectacle "the emphasis was on performances which were designed to elicit intense and instantaneous visual pleasure; the production of imagery and action which would excite, astound and astonish the audience". The assertion that the train surfer's historical predecessor is the circus, can be furthered by arguing that twenty first-century reality television is the modern 'circus master's ring' for showcasing spectacles, and thus, train surfing's modern precursor.[11]

To return to the circus metaphor: train surfers, just like trapeze artists, prepare for a show and follow a certain routine. Train surfers also know all the different trains, their departing times and they select coaches and stations where they can train surf. In video 7 the train surfers also mention that they 'study' the distance between cables when they train surf backwards. This indicates that train surfing is a planned and deliberate performance. The train surfers are conscious of the fact that their performance needs to be faultless in order to survive the stunt. It is, thus, concluded that train surfing is an extreme performance type or a ritual similar to a rite of passage.[12]

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[11] Reality shows such as *Survivor*, *Amazing Race*, and *Fear Factor* all exhibit normal contestants who have to participate in so-called challenges to be transformed from an ordinary person into a celebrity. Reality television, thus, fulfils the requirements of the modern spectacle: it must showcase spectacular, daring or physically challenging performances that will inevitably vault one person to stardom (i.e. the spectacle is a rite of transition in itself). Train surfing follows the same dialectic: the spatial spectacle enables the train surfer to produce imagery that amazes and overwhelms his audience; and it is this performance that catapults him into the sphere of cyber fame.

[12] John MacAloon (1984:243) states that "most ceremonies and rituals are spectacles." Although viewers or audiences of spectacles choose to watch these spectacles, rituals, on the other hand, require participants to dutifully attend the ritual.

Victor Turner (1984:21), states that certain liminal rites such as birth rites, puberty rites, nuptial rites, funerary rites, as well as festivals and carnivals such as the Mardi Gras or the Carnival Carême are performed in front of spectators to "mark ... transitions from social invisibility to social visibility". Evidence that supports this claim is found in Shiba's account of how he was transformed from an unknown boy to a well-known figure through the act of train surfing. Turner (1984:21) also mentions "life-crisis rituals" where "novices are initiated into adulthood or into the mysteries of a cult". Train surfing, in this context, is read as a life-crisis ritual because novice train surfers are initiated or taught how to train surf by experienced surfers. As such train surfing is regarded as an initiation rite where young boys become men if they succeed.

Related to the above is the presupposition that train surfing is a performance that creates an "arena for appearing" (Meyerhoff 1984:156).[13] The invisible and anonymous can become visible through the spectacle that is train surfing. For Barbara Meyerhoff (1984:156) this arena has certain elements such as "a willing audience" and the subjects' commitment to demonstrate "accomplishments". To this extent train surfing has an audience that is willing to watch and experience all the train surfing stunts. The train surfing audience is comprised of fellow surfers, spectators or onlookers on platforms, bridges and trains, and a heterogeneous audience comprising of online/Internet users who either watch videos from *YouTube* and other social networking sites on their computers or mobile phones or who view online pictures of train surfing. Train surfers' commitment to their performance is exhibited through the careful design or format of the act: getting onto the train, performing one or more stunts (showcasing their accomplishments), getting off the train (surviving) or being killed. There are also certain variations on this theme: train surfers can perform different stunts and the outcome can either be life, where the performance becomes a celebration, or death, where the act of dying turns into a commemoration.

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[13] Prince Shiba states that he would "appear" on top of a train and this evoked a sense of awe in his spectators (*Special Assignment* 2006).

Turner (1984:26), furthermore, asserts that "ordinary life in a social structure is itself a performance". Hence, the begging question is, what keeps one from claiming that train surfing is a performance? It has all the normative elements or roles that comprise a spectacle: performers (train surfers), danger and intrigue (stunts, speed, electrical cables, death), a stage (the train, railway tracks, stations), and an audience (onlookers and online viewers). The roles train surfers don are that of villain, hero or tragic hero depending on the outcome of the spectacle. If the train surfer survives his stunts, he is a hero; if he dies during train surfing, he is a tragic hero; and if he is caught by the community recruiting 'innocent' boys to train surf, he becomes the villain. It can therefore be concluded that train surfing is a spectacle that consists of various elements and if one of these elements is missing, there can be no spectacle.

It is also argued that train surfing is a timeless or unworldly event: the viewer does not need to know when the video was shot or when the stunts occurred, all that matters is that the viewer is enveloped in the experience of watching train surfing occur. Figure 12 demonstrates train surfing's ability to hold the viewer's gaze. Meyerhoff (1984:173) also

Figure 12: Baptista, the train surfer, Sa.
(http://gurn.files.wordpress.com/2008/09/batista-sanza-hanza1.jpg).

mentions the disruption of time: "to do their work [spectacles] must disrupt our ordinary sense of time and displace our awareness of events coming into being". The viewer must lose himself in the visuals he sees, he must be transfixed on the train surfer and the narrative that is being played out on top, below or next to the train. The viewer does not need to know when or where the stunt was performed, what matters is that train surfing is *seen*. This visual, thus, displaces the viewer's awareness of time and place and emphasises the moment in which the spectacle is captured.

John MacAloon (1984:243) contributes to the discourse of the spectacle by stating "spectacles give primacy to visual sensory and symbolic codes; they are things to be seen". Train surfing *is* visually spectacular. Mountain climbing, sky-diving, shark cage diving are all dangerous, high risk activities, but when compared to train surfing, they lack the visual ferocity and intensity inherent to watching someone train surf. Here, MacAloon (1984:245) corroborates that spectacles are about "scale and intensity" versus the "puny efforts of the camera to capture it in two-dimensional images" (MacAloon 1984:245). A 'live' train surfing performance is much more frightening when compared to watching the performance on a computer or television screen that seems to constrict the spectacle. The spectacle is too expansive to be fully grasped in this medium, and the television or online viewer might be tempted to witness the full extent of train surfing in 'real' life.

Further aspects of the spectacle are that it denotes "wonder and awe" and it can be "irregular, occasional, open-ended, even spontaneous" (MacAloon 1984:246). Evidence that train surfing is an awe-inspiring performance is found in the *Special Assignment* (2006) documentary. Mzimela states that at the end of a train surfing day, people would say "Lefa, you are the man". This slang statement connotes that onlookers admired his stunts, they were amazed at his performance, and they thought him to be a superior surfer.

The last facet that substantiates train surfing as spectacle, is that "the spectacle frame erected around ritual may serve as a recruiting device" (MacAloon 1984:268). In *Special*

Assignment (2006) Shiba recounts how a young boy was so enthralled by what he was seeing on top of the train, he decided to participate in the ritual of becoming 'seen' (becoming socially visible). The young boy's act of being seen was abruptly ended when he lost his footing, Shiba 'froze' and was unable help him, thus, the unknown surfer fell off and was killed. This illustrates train surfing's power to become an enlisting device for marginalised boys who wish to be admired and respected. Train surfing as a performance also entails narrating a story, whether the story is one of becoming socially visible, entertaining onlookers or escaping one's circumstances. This statement is discussed in more detail in the following section.

2.4   Surfing a story: narration as inherent part of train surfing

Since train surfing is read as an act or performance, the author argues that the video documentation of train surfing also tells the viewer/spectator a certain story. To substantiate this point, the author investigates how narration is achieved in the seven train surfing videos.

Narration in video 1 is done through black screens with superimposed words. The visual story of the terminally ill man who has taken up train surfing follows the classic story telling structure of a beginning, a middle (exposition) and an end. This story has, however, a twist in the tale: the statement at the beginning of video 1 only becomes clear at the end. And the viewer does not realise that he/she is watching a deceased person. Video 1 can also be read as a visual diary of a terminally ill man. He documents his train surfing stunts that acts as a visual testament that he did live life to the full during his last year on earth.

It can be argued that train surfing is not only a spectacle enacted for a specific audience, but that the visual documentation of train surfing is a very specific form of storytelling. Some people write stories; others narrate their life experiences through art, painting, song and dance; but train surfing is telling the story of 'this is who I am at a very specific point in time – this is what has made me famous – this is the way that I would like to tell my

life's story'. Video 1 tells the story of a person who has nothing to lose: a person with no future prospects. The author believes that train surfing is a performance that tells the viewer: 'I live in this moment, and play with the notion of dying, because I have no alternatives'. In the context of video 1, train surfing is a subversive performance or spectacle enacted by a person who has a bleak future.

The content of video 2 is introduced by a news reader who identifies the train surfer (in both video 1 and 2) as Stephan Schwartz. Although the black screens used in video 1 are removed, the viewer is still able to construct a narrative of the video. Video 2 does not explicitly state that Schwartz died from leukaemia, but the message that the 'main character' has died, is still evident. The omission that Schwartz died of leukaemia changes the narrative because the viewer might (erroneously) assume that Schwartz died during a train surfing accident.

Another aspect that differs from video 1 is Schwartz's portrayal as a hero or victor. This additional character trait is established through the use of certain camera angles. The low angle shot on the railway tracks with the train surfer walking by when the train passes over the camera suggests that the train surfer has conquered yet another stunt – he is in control and the train did not kill him. The high angle camera shot showing the train station when the train surfer evades a uniformed man (perhaps a security official) shows how the train surfer glances at the security official in a manner that mocks his authority. The security official does not attempt to stop him and this suggests that the train surfer is beyond anyone's control – he is a free spirit who does not answer to anyone, and train surfing is an act that subverts any form of authority.

The narration style in video 3 is ambiguous: there is no clear distinguishable beginning or exposition. The viewer does not know whether the video was made on one day or on different days during different train surfing journeys. The video can also be read as a visual diary of 'a day in the life of a train surfer'. The whole video is, thus, a long train surfing ride through the city of Hamburg. The end of the video is quite peculiar: it does not end with a dangerous train surfing move, but it ends with pan shots of a train carrying

army tanks. The voice of the off-screen video operator states, "Afghanistan here we come". In the context of Germany, these words and the image of the army supply train might suggest that Germany's youth is still trying to come to terms with its World War II war heritage. The inclusion of this image and words might have been unintentional and the creator of the video's thoughts might never be known, but the author believes the creator included it for a specific reason, whether it be expressing his sympathies to the war in Afghanistan, voicing his concern over the war, or simply as a sign that should instil terror in the viewer.

There are two strands of narration in video 5, namely visual text and verbal (voice-over) text. The visual text showcases the stunts of Brazilian train surfers. The verbal text is American and patronises the acts or stunts of the train surfers. The viewer can interpret the 'story' based on the two different narrations. If the viewer is guided purely by the visuals, he/she can come to the conclusion that the train surfers are brave and that they are masters of this particular high-risk activity. Or, if the viewer is guided by the verbal text, he/she can deduce that train surfing is lunacy – why would anyone train surf if there are no career opportunities and the likely outcome is death? When the two strands of narration are combined, the viewer might interpret the video as a 'spoof' or parody: a story created to mock, to comment on or to make fun of train surfing and the socio-economic circumstances of Brazilian train surfers.

The two television news reports from *Russia Today* (2010) and *Sky News* (2006) as well as the *Special Assignment* (2006) documentary follow the classic journalism narration structure. The focus of the above-mentioned videos is on facts, identifying sources/subjects, creating a context for the story and trying to contextualise why the phenomenon of train surfing is taking place. The journalists in all three videos take a neutral stance regarding the train surfing phenomenon and try to present a balanced story to the viewer. The purpose of the news stories and the documentary is to inform the public of what train surfing entails and perhaps to try to explain the phenomenon.

In *Russia Today* (2010), Greeves points out that there are many risks involved in train surfing, but thereafter a young train surfer is given the opportunity to voice his opinion. The train surfer feels that train surfing is just another high-risk activity such as sky-diving. The main narrative in this news report seems to be one of escapism. Russian youths ride trains to escape their mundane lives and train surfing is the right 'spice' to enliven their daily routines.

The *Sky News* (2006) video offers three perspectives on train surfing. The journalist, Hertz, is the medium through which three distinct angles are heard. The first viewpoint is that of the objective reporter who introduces the video by detailing what train surfing is: a practice of dodging cables while riding on top of a moving train. Hertz also states that train surfing is a dangerous after-school activity enjoyed by Soweto's youth. Another feature of train surfing is that it is normally practiced in gangs and drugs and alcohol play a role in the 'preparation' stage (before the gangs train surf, they will smoke *dagga*[14] and drink alcohol).[15] Train surfing gang members also challenge each other to take bigger risks and train surfing is compared to an addiction.

The second viewpoint is of two hardcore train surfers, Kabelo and Thabang. They state that train surfing is a "game" played to entertain other people (*Sky News* 2006). Although three of their friends have died, they have no intention to stop train surfing. These two individuals become the face of train surfers in Soweto. The viewer is likely to generalise and believe that all train surfers are unrepentant, nonchalant about death and ignorant to the dangers associated with this activity. The last perspective is of Tumi Mlou who is wheelchair-bound after a train surfing accident. He had to reform his life and he is used as a symbol or martyr of train surfing's dangers.

Although three perspectives are given, the overriding narrative in this video is one of escapism. This is confirmed by Hertz's statement that poverty and boredom is experienced throughout Soweto, and that train surfing is regarded as a "way to escape"

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[14] *Dagga* is the colloquial term used by South Africans to refer to marijuana.
[15] The influence of drugs, alcohol and other socio-economic factors on train surfers are discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.3.

these circumstance (*Sky News* 2006). The bleak images of the township, the clothing worn by the train surfers and the general state of decay witnessed in the *veld* scene all contribute to the notion that train surfers are impoverished and live in impecunious conditions. If train surfing can make Soweto's faceless young men "famous and respected," it seems like an escape-route many young men are likely to take (*Sky News* 2006).

In *Special Assignment* (2006) great care is taken to contextualise the phenomenon of train surfing in Soweto. The focus is placed on three train surfers and their stories: biographical details are given, and interviews with the train surfers' mothers and Mzimela's girlfriend are included to form a well-rounded perspective of train surfing in Soweto. Emphasis is also placed on the influence that alcohol, absent or abusive fathers as well as single-mothers raising children alone in a township have on young adolescents.

For instance, Prince Shiba's narrative is one of a reformed train surfer. Shiba was a very experienced train surfer and he was so skilled that he taught other boys, like Lefa Mzimela, to train surf. During his time as a train surfer he used to steal commuters' cell phones and handbags. These criminal activities led to his arrest and he had to spend time in jail. His train surfing days are depicted in a contradictory fashion: he seems to enjoy performing train surfing stunts for the camera and he relishes the opportunity to tell the viewer in great detail how famous he was. On the other hand, while standing in front of his home with his mother, he banishes the thought of ever train surfing again and shows the viewer a picture of "Tha hell" or Johannesburg's prison.[16] His story has three chapters: his train surfing days, his new life and his dreams. He assures the viewer that he is reformed thanks to his mother enrolling him at a beauty school. His new life is one filled with training to become a hairdresser, washing cars when he is not attending hairdressing school, and dreaming to open a hair salon in an abandoned container.

The second character is Lefa Mzimela, who was 15 years old when the documentary was produced. His story is one of an impressionable boy who is scared of dying, but who still

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[16] Shiba uses township vernacular to refer to Johannesburg's prison, that is, he calls the prison 'the hell.'

train surfs because, as he says, "sometimes evil grabs me and I cannot help myself" (*Special Assignment* 2006). He admires his sisters with a Matric certificate (Grade 12) and he would like to be like them, but he succumbs to the urge to train surf when he sees "guys all dressed up. They drive flashy cars. I want to be like that" (*Special Assignment* 2006). In 2005 Mzimela was involved in a serious train surfing accident. He briefly stopped surfing, but started riding trains again to protect his girlfriend. In an interventionist-type scene Mzimela's mother is depicted as a woman living in constant fear that her son will die. In response Mzimela tells his mother that he wants to change, he asks for forgiveness, and expresses the wish to make his mother proud. Mzimela states that he wants to "wash my hands of these hideous activities. I want to focus on my well-being. Make my mom, girlfriend and sisters happy. I want to be a doctor and drive a fancy car" (*Special Assignment* 2006).

The next scene should be a continuation of Mzimela's good intentions and the viewer is led to believe that he has turned over a new leaf when he is shown going back to school. The narrator, however, states that although Mzimela went back to school he did not bring any books: he loitered around and went back to Joubert Park to play pool and drink alcohol. The viewer then has to draw his/her own conclusion whether Mzimela's penitence was earnest or hollow.

The last character, Tshepiso Ntohla, is depicted as a young man who was raised in a house without a father. His mother has three children and she looks after her deceased sister's two children. Ntohla and his mother are filmed inside their humble home and the viewer sees a family who struggles to make ends meet. Mrs. Ntohla's account of Tshepiso's train surfing forms a picture of a dejected woman who is unable to persuade her son to stop train surfing. She states that Tshepiso is addicted to alcohol and that she took him to SANCA (South African National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence) for his drinking problems. Other than the fact that Tshepiso fuels his train surfing stunts with alcohol, the viewer does not gain any other insight into what his dreams are or if he will stop train surfing. Compared to Shiba and Mzimela, Ntohla is portrayed as a one-dimensional character.

Although the visuals of video 7 depict the most extreme form of train surfing, the verbal codes hint at an escape route. Train surfing can be stopped if train surfers have a dream, whether attainable or unattainable. It would seem that train surfing is an activity performed to escape reality.[17] As soon as train surfers have dreams, new lifestyles or new goals, they are able to stop practicing this activity. In both the *Sky News* (2006) report and the *Special Assignment* (2006) documentary, train surfing is compared to an addiction. Ntohla states "I want to stop. We all want to stop. Once you get hooked you cannot" (*Special Assignment* 2006). As such, train surfing is regarded as an activity that personifies an existential crisis. Train surfing is an act in which the train surfer performs a very specific state of mind: 'I train surf in order to escape boredom, my socio-economic circumstances, my pain, and my fear – and as soon as I have formed a dream or a goal, I can stop train surfing, because I have something to live for'. Train surfing is, thus, a performance that acts as a transition stage between boredom or fatalism and realising certain goals.[18][19]

Based on the assumption that train surfing is a performance ritual, Sophia Morgan (1984:80) elaborates that ritual is "the very origin of all narrative, and even Roland Barthes calls literature 'a ritual space'". The visual texts of train surfing then surely convey visual (nonverbal) and verbal stories to the viewer. As such train surfing is the enactment of a ritualistic journey consisting of various meta-narratives. These narratives may include the following: firstly, train surfers surf for being seen and to attain an elevated social status; the act is secondly performed as a rite of passage into adulthood (an initiation ritual); and thirdly, as a way to narrate their daily circumstances.

Morgan (1984:80) also maintains that "both rituals and narratives are reflexive". The viewer may interpret only segments of either the ritual or the narrative the ritual invokes. As such it is proposed that the ritual (train surfing) reflects current societal/individual

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[17] Videos 4, 6 and 7 all share a common denominator: train surfing is escapism.
[18] Mzimela says "you need something to help you stop", meaning that one must aspire to become someone else or form goals or dreams that could keep one occupied (*Special Assignment* 2006).
[19] Morgan (1984:81) states that "ritual is [performed in] a privileged space of liminality" meaning that train surfing is indeed enacted in a liminal or transitional space.

problems or crises. Regarding the third proposed narrative, one might read the act as fatalistic: 'Township life is hard, situations are life-threatening, death is inevitable and whether I will die a horrible death in the township or die horribly in a train surfing accident, it makes no difference to me'.

Due to the fact that rituals are reflexive, the meaning of the ritual is illuminated through other facts or sentences which were uttered by the train surfers. From the *Sky News* (2006), *Special Assignment* (2006) and *Russia Today* (2010) videos the overarching purpose of train surfing is voiced by the train surfers themselves: they perform the ritual to either escape boredom, become famous or to take on different identities. To this extent, the ritual of train surfing is read as a "journey of transformation" (Morgan 1984:100). The hero/tragic hero/pseudo hero figure is unknown at the beginning of his journey, he becomes known through his surfing endeavours, and he then either dies or reverts back to a state of anonymity when he stops train surfing. This makes the performance of train surfing paradoxical in essence.

Part of the performance's drama is imminent death. It is perhaps not always a literal outcome of the drama, but omnipotent death is thinly veiled in all seven videos. Myerhoff (1984:150) states that death becomes "a cultural drama, shaped to human purpose until it becomes an affirmation rather than a negation of life". The visual eulogy to Schwartz (videos 1 and 2), who died of leukaemia, serves as illustration that the footage commemorates his life and serves as a token that he did live. Other explicit references to death are made in *Sky News* (2006) where three friends of Kabelo and Thabang who died train surfing are mentioned, and in *Special Assignment* (2006) where footage of a dead train surfer (Lwazi) and his funeral is included. An analysis of the videos renders a twofold representation of death: in *Special Assignment* (2006) death is depicted as something to be feared (from the mothers' perspective) versus death as an inevitable part of the performance for the train surfers.[20]

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[20] Death as something to be dreaded is voiced by Mzimela's mother who says "I live in fear, waiting for the day I will get a call, come and collect your bones at the station ... he is dead" (*Special Assignment* 2006). A fatalistic mindset regarding death is exemplified by Shiba who says "a dead man is a dead man. Maybe I will go to his funeral. Maybe not. I would not lose sleep over it" (*Special Assignment* 2006). Thabang also

To clarify why certain rituals, rites of passage and spectacles are enacted, the author turns to Meyerhoff (1984:151) who states "ritual is prominent in all areas of uncertainty, anxiety, impotence, and disorder. By its repetitive character it provides a message of pattern and predictability". From the visual evidence seen in train surfing videos from Brazil, Russia and South Africa it is clear that train surfing is practiced in harsh and uncertain circumstances by people living in poverty and who experience political and socio-economic uncertainness.[21] Train surfers, who are part of the subculture of train surfing, have no control over the above-mentioned circumstances and these adolescents could be viewed as insignificant individuals with no economic potency. They are thus, invisible and marginal subjects. The author argues that having control over one's way of dying creates a feeling of being in control of one aspect of one's life, which might be the reason why train surfing occurs: the ever present quest to be an autonomous subject.

Train surfing is, thus, not only a performance but also a ritual that is practiced by a certain subculture, namely train surfers. Richard Schechner (2002:45) states that performances involve "ritualised gestures and sounds". In the seven train surfing videos that have been analysed it is evident through the narration of the surfers that their stunts are copied from experienced train surfers. According to Schechner (2002), performances also entail behaviour that is copied or mimicked. In the case of train surfing, experienced

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underlines the idea that death is perhaps an 'enviable' outcome: "the more they die, the more we want to die like them" (*Sky News* 2006).

[21] The overall socio-economic climate in both the North and the South are currently overshadowed by unemployment, due to the worldwide economic recession, as well as political instability. As Russia was featured in one of the train surfing videos, it is used as an example of the socio-economic crisis experienced in the North. Andrea Peters (2010:1) states that the unemployment figures in Russia stood at 9,2% or 6,8 million people in 2010. Features of daily life in Russia, according to Peters (2010:1), include "rising prices, falling incomes, wage arrears and an inability to buy basic necessities". Russia has experienced social discontent due to the "job crisis and overall economic situation" (Peters 2010:1). As a result Russians staged protests/demonstrations in 2010 against falling living standards. These demonstrations were staged in cities such as Kaliningrad, Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Ekaterinburg. The International Labour Organisation (2003:1) argues that in "both the industrialised and the developing countries, employment has ceased to be a purely technical issue. Prevailing realities have made it a political challenge". In Latin America, approximately 100 million people "have either no work at all, or work that cannot be considered decent" (International Labour Organisation 2003:1). According to Index Mundi (2010:1) the unemployment figure in Brazil was 8,1% in 2010 and in South Africa the fourth quarter (2010) statistics revealed that unemployment was at 24% or 4,1 million unemployed people (Statistics South Africa 2011:1). These statistics clearly show that both countries in the Northern and Southern hemispheres are faced with challenges regarding employment security, poverty and the eradication of unemployment.

train surfers are copied by inexperienced surfers, and as such, train surfing can be interpreted as a "twice-behaved, coded, transmittable" behaviour (Schechner 2002:45). In the case of train surfing, masculinity is performed by the train surfers. Judith Butler (1988:523) states that "the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time". By performing the act of train surfing the train surfers ritually engage in acts that showcase their masculinity. They 'perform' their gender by engaging in extremely dangerous stunts that exemplify their bravery and masculinity. Butler (1988:526) asserts that "gender is an act that has been rehearsed". As such, by performing train surfing moves over a long period of time, train surfers solidify their masculine personas. Butler (1988:526) also refers to Victor Turner who states:

> social action requires a performance which is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimation [emphasis in original].

Extremely dangerous acts that border on the suicidal are associated with being performed by men. Train surfing is, therefore, interpreted as an act that legitimates the train surfers' masculinity.

Train surfing as a performative act can also be related to rituals and 'play' performances. For Schechner (2002:45) rituals and 'play' performances are

> a way people remember. Rituals are memories in action, encoded into actions. Rituals also help people ... deal with difficult transitions, ambivalent relationships, hierarchies, and desires that trouble, exceed, or violate the norms of daily life. Play gives people a chance to temporarily experience the taboo, the excessive, and the risky.

In light of Schechner's assertion, train surfing is described as a fluid act that is performed in both the ritual sphere as well as in the area of 'play' performances. Firstly, it fits into the ritual category because train surfing indeed aids train surfers in dealing with oppressive spatial structures such as townships as well as personal troubles or difficulties such as financial and social stresses. Secondly, this 'play' performance enables train surfers to experience risk and danger through the participation in an activity that is regarded as delinquent.

Schechner (2002:45), furthermore, states that rituals and 'play' performances "lead people into a 'second reality' separate from ordinary life ... When they temporarily

become or enact another, people perform actions different from what they do ordinarily. Thus, ritual and play transform people, either permanently or temporarily". It is also noted by Schechner (2002) that rituals such as matrimonial rites and rites of passage permanently transform social agents who participate in the act, whereas 'play' performances only transform participants temporarily. In the case of train surfing, that is interpreted as both a ritual and as a 'play' performance, the ritual element transforms train surfers permanently as they are 'initiated' through the act of train surfing. This initiation is a frustrated process for it does not really integrate the individual into the group. That is, the social status of train surfers changes from being regarded as boys to being seen as men. Furthermore, the 'play' element transforms train surfers temporarily: they move from being socially invisible (when they are not train surfing) to being socially visible (when they are performing the act).

Schechner (2002:62) also points out that participants in ritualised performances experience camaraderie or "communitas". This feeling of "being in tune" with other participants is regarded as a psychological motivator that usher people into performing the ritual (Schechner 2002:62). It is evident from the television documentaries of train surfing in the South that these surfers also experience 'communitas' during their performance. The documentaries clearly portray train surfing in the South as a gregarious activity wherein surfers encourage one another to perform dangerous stunts.

To summarise, train surfing is interpreted as a performative act through which a certain subculture namely train surfers enact and embody their masculinity. This performative act is not only a ritual but also a play performance through which the participants perform their masculinity; it is an initiation rite that changes the participants' social status; and it is a performance enables the participants to be socially visible.

2.5   Conclusion

Although train surfing varies only slightly in all the countries investigated, Germany, Russia, Brazil and South Africa, the showcased extremity and level of risk seem to be the

highest in Brazil and South Africa. Train surfing is not only an act that requires 'technical' precision and skill, but also athleticism and brute strength on the part of the surfer. It is difficult to precisely detail how each move or stunt is performed, thus translating it in a verbal code is arduous. As such, train surfing exceeds verbal expression and one has to witness the visual performance as well to understand more fully what it entails. The author has attempted to form a mental picture for the reader of the different stages of train surfing: from embarking a train, performing stunts and disembarking a train. But semantic structures, in my opinion, do not do justice to train surfing as a performance.

This brings the author to the next assertion: train surfing is a spectacle that also has to be experienced and viewed to be more fully comprehended. The spectator, viewer, audience or onlooker plays a crucial role in making the spectacle memorable. In all the videos the train surfers look directly at the camera, inviting the viewer to relive the experience with him/them. Without the spectator, there would not be a spectacle, and thus, train surfing is understood as an act through which the (insignificant) socially invisible train surfer is made visible. He acquires prominence when he dominates the viewer's television or computer screen. The marginalised surfer has become an active, autonomous agent through his meaningful ritual. Without an audience, the train surfer's stunts would be meaningless: he needs affirmation in the form of cheers, applause and adulation to know that he has in fact achieved the impossible.

Spectacles, rites of passage and rituals were also shown to be born from harsh living conditions, times of uncertainty and crisis. As such train surfing is reasoned to be a spectacle that narrates different realities. The spectacle of train surfing, thus, points towards the formation of different spatial narratives that convey meaning. These stories include surfing to entertain, to escape unbearable living conditions, and surfing for self-affirmation. To conclude, the author draws on MacAloon's (1984:247) suggestion that "cultural performances may be understood as stories a people tell about themselves". Train surfing is, thus, a spectacle wherein young men tell unique stories through their extreme spatial performance.

Chapter Two attempted to visually document the phenomenon of train surfing firstly within a global context and thereafter, specifically within a South African frame. The next chapter investigates the city of Johannesburg and the township of Soweto to form a clear picture of the milieu wherein train surfing occurs. Chapter Three also tries to explore Johannesburg's authoritarian past and current post-authoritarian character to uncover which spatial impetuses have had an impact on the way urbanites decode urban space and how they invent spatial practices/strategies through which the city is lived. Township space, where train surfers live, is thereafter scrutinised as hybrid or liminal space to reveal that space can act as a catalyst for bringing forth agency and change.

CHAPTER THREE
AUTHORITARIAN AND POST-AUTHORITARIAN JOHANNESBURG

3.1   Introduction

The city of Johannesburg is a multi-facetted space whose character has changed dramatically over the past 100 years. Although many people call this city home – a place where one can be free[1] – the opposite is also true. People have to continuously fight to gain a home in the city. It is through the struggle to delineate territories – the process of creating a home in the city, and the need to find a place that evokes a sense of belonging – that urban space is shaped. This process of embedding oneself in the city to become an inhabitant turns the city into "a highly cosmopolitan but also an extremely polarised social geography" (Dawson 2004:17). In this regard Johannesburg can be called a site of struggle because throughout its history different races and classes engaged in various violent and legislative practices to exert control over the city. Miners from across the world proclaimed Johannesburg a digging site in the nineteenth century, Afrikaners deemed Johannesburg an important bastion of the Transvaal during their republican reign in 1881, and later in 1902 the city was under strict British rule. Today the city resides in democratic South Africa and as such Johannesburg can be interpreted as being both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian city.

Cities are not only inhabited by diverse populations, they are also burdened with issues such as crime, disease and lawlessness. One of industrialisation's by-products is the enormous concrete jungles that have replaced or substituted nature. Frederic Jameson (2004:195) describes this as a "radical eclipse of Nature: Heidegger's field path is ... irrevocably destroyed by late capital ... and by the megalopolis". Hence cities come into existence with dark underbellies, characterised by crime, alienation and homogenisation (Rosenthal 2000:34). In the context of describing cities that are typified by crime and the

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[1] Jane Jacobs (1969:458) also refers to the notion that "city air makes free". Georg Simmel (1980:26) similarly states that "it is not only the immediate size of the area and the number of persons which, because of the universal historical correlation between the enlargement of the circle and the personal inner and outer freedom, has made the metropolis the locale of freedom. It is rather in transcending this visible expanse that any given city becomes the seat of cosmopolitanism".

need to find a solution to make city space safer, David Schmid (1995:243) portrays urban space as "chaotic and in need of order," and the city thus becomes "a problem that needs to be solved".[2] The idea that the city is a conundrum that begs for answers links with the concept that the city is a mysterious place where people are actively engaging with the urban environment in the search for meaning. Space is thus always culturally produced, as Schmid states (1995:244) "space is never reduced to a neutral setting or backdrop. And as much as the city can be enigmatic, it is invested with crime, violence and poverty".

It must be noted that the author interprets city space simultaneously as ambivalent and paradoxical. Although throughout this chapter city space is read as oppressive and controlling, the author is aware that various positive social and cultural activities as well as community building projects are underway in Johannesburg and Soweto. It is, however, essential to the author's research to investigate the underbelly of cities and the harsh living conditions in townships in order to place the extreme spatial practice of train surfing into perspective. Without building a solid foundation whereby the political and spatial impetuses that influence township dwellers are exposed, it cannot convincingly be argued that there are any obstacles that train surfers must overcome, escape or transgress. In this chapter the author explores so-called 'problem areas' such as townships and the inner city that are riddled with crime, to highlight that ordinary citizens who live in these demarcated areas have become marginalised and it is argued that their experiences of city life and urban space is different from inhabitants in 'socially acceptable' areas such as Johannesburg's northern suburbs. The train surfer, who lives in a township, can therefore be described as being a marginalised individual who originates from a very specific social class and because of his distinctive urban milieu, interprets and navigates post-authoritarian Johannesburg in a very unique manner in order to find meaning and perhaps even a sense of self.

Throughout this chapter the author is regarded as a "visual culture archaeologist" who needs to grapple with historic and present-day interpretations of the city to construct a

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[2] Jacobs (1961:87) states that cities should be "identified, understood and treated as problems of organised complexity".

vivid image of Johannesburg and the township of Soweto. This cumbersome task begins with the concept that geographic territory or space can be explored as a site of struggle or resistance. In order to achieve this outcome the founding years of Johannesburg are encapsulated in a historical overview that focuses on the various social, racial and political groups that occupied the city. When the political groups and their authority over city space are discussed clear references are made to how they shaped Johannesburg.

Thereafter the focus shifts to Johannesburg as a Janus-faced city that can be examined as both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct. Johannesburg is described as a divided, fragmented city that is linked to the concept that space is never neutral and that the spatial organisation of post-authoritarian Johannesburg is still exclusionary in nature. The divisionary character of Johannesburg and its shifting boundaries are investigated along with the effects of urbanism and new forms of control such as gated communities.

The discussion then turns to marginalised and hybrid spaces such as townships that have been amputated from the collective body of the productive city, and are seen as separate spaces that exist alongside the sprawling body of the modern metropolis. Because township space is analysed as both a marginal and hybrid construct, it takes on a positive, agency-giving character and it is argued that because of this unique character, the township of Soweto is discussed as a place of struggle where township inhabitants actively engaged (and subsequently still engage) in social, cultural and spatial practices to construct meaningful lives.

3.2   Dissecting Johannesburg: peeling away the layers of time

Joburg, Jozi, Egoli, the City of Gold – these are some of the names Johannesburg is known by. These names are incantations that evoke a feeling of plurality, of trying to define the indefinable, of the intrinsic duality of a city which is lived and experienced in different ways by its heterogeneous population. Just as the city has many names, it also has different layers of meaning, sediments of different periods of history open to analysis.

The history of the Transvaal province, where Johannesburg is situated, starts with the 1838 arrival of the Voortrekkers under command of Paul Kruger and Hendrik Potgieter, and the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand in 1886, states GA Leyds (1964:1). MS Appelgryn (1985:4) further details the history of the province and states that "sporadic prospecting" had been done in the early 1850s but it was not until October 1871 that gold fever swept the country with the discovery of the Eersteling gold mine near Pietersburg. The first Anglo-Boer War (1880 – 1881) interrupted the search for gold, but after the restoration of peace, prospecting began once again. During 1886 'Main Reef' was discovered on the Witwatersrand and attracted numerous prospectors to the mining town. In the wake of this news, residents of Pretoria approached the government to proclaim the farms on which the Main Reef was located, Langlaagte and Turffontein, public digging sites. Colonel IP Ferreira, one of the signatories of the petition, moved to the goldfields and erected tents on the Turffontein farm. According to Appelgryn (1985:8), Ferreira's camp would eventually become "the metropolis of Johannesburg".[34] The town's name was conceived during the gold rush and according to Appelgryn (1985:28), Johannesburg was named after Christiaan Johannes Joubert (Head of Mining Affairs) and Johann BF Rissik (surveyor-general).

At first governance over the new town was not enforced vigorously due to the seemingly 'fleeting' nature of all migrant towns.[5] But as scores of miners flocked to the City of Gold, various political and racial groups had to lay claim to their surroundings. Three

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[3] According to *De Volkstem* of 28 September 1886 Ferreira's camp consisted of approximately thirty houses constructed of wood, iron and canvas. There were also boarding houses and canteens that graced the dusty streets of the camp, and the estimated population consisted of 250 people (Appelgryn 1985:14). Ferreira's camp was bounded by "what are now Alexander, Marshall, Ferreira and Market Streets" (Leyds 1964:21).

[4] The three farms that made up Johannesburg were Turffontein, west of this farm were Langlaagte, and to the north-east a piece of state-owned land called Randjeslaagte (Appelgryn 1985:14).

[5] The inhabitants were uncertain about the lifespan of the town and therefore no one was concerned about building an extravagant city and infrastructure. Johannesburg was from its beginnings deemed a migrant town which was reflected in the rudimentary 'architecture'. Trees were a rare sight, as "the residents seemed to be quite happy to regard it primarily an industrial environment, where galvanised iron was more appropriate than trees" (*Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* 1986:36). Tents and temporary shacks were not erected in close proximity of one another as the struggle for survival in the mining camps demanded "a large measure of independence, which was also reflected in the isolation of the houses" (*Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* 1986:41). According to Leyds (1964:143), the "transitory nature of the new town" meant that little land was set aside for public buildings as Johannesburg was a mining camp and as many stands as possible were laid out and sold before the "anticipated slump" set in.

distinct political classes were present in the Transvaal during the early 1890s. According to Leyds (1964:35), they were "the *burgers*[6] who ruled, and Natives who had to obey [and] white people without a vote who produced a large share of the wealth of the country". The population of Johannesburg was thus divided into *burgers* of the Transvaal (Boers) and '*uitlanders*' or foreigners who have been suspicious of one another since the birth of the city.[7]

Johannesburg can furthermore be deemed as a city founded upon capitalist interests: the Afrikaner population who spearheaded the government at the time, thought of themselves as the rightful owners of the land and the mineral rights; Imperialist mining magnates came to Johannesburg to exploit the riches of the gold mines; and lastly poor immigrant miners, black and Indian labourers also wanted to share in the Witwatersrand's gold bounty. Owing to each group's capitalist interests the town was divided along socioeconomic and racial lines.

The first aspect of the spatial arrangement of Johannesburg is the material characteristics of the early town. Due to the fact that miners, adventurists, capitalists, traders and speculators flooded the town at remarkable speed, town planners had no time to thoroughly plan its layout, causing the unsystematic organisation of tents and basic amenities. As the town expanded and the population increased, the Transvaal Government realised that inhabitants and the physical layout of the town had to be controlled to curb violence, crime and overpopulation. The two dominant classes, namely the Afrikaners and foreign mining magnates, exerted control over the spatial character of the city in different ways.

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[6] *Burgers* is an Afrikaans word that can be translated as someone who is a citizen of a country or a republic. This word is particularly loaded with symbolic meaning as it connotes notions such as being a rightful inhabitant of a specific place, and in this case, only Afrikaners were regarded as *burgers* of the Transvaal.
[7] Johannesburg "was a city of strangers with no sense of allegiance to the State or Government" (*Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* 1986:20). As there were more foreigners than Afrikaners in the city, the Afrikaners were fearful of a takeover. Most of the foreigners had little or no understanding or respect for the ideals and aspirations of the Kruger Government, and they were only interested in power and wealth and could not understand how a pastoral and patriarchal state would dare to stand in their way (*Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* 1986:23).

The Afrikaner segment of the population, which indirectly implies the ruling Transvaal government led by President Paul Kruger, made a two-fold contribution to the city of Johannesburg, namely the segregation of social and racial classes to different areas and the implementation of a railway system.

During the 1890s the Afrikaners were in power and segregated different race groups in different areas: Afrikaners were concentrated in the Brickfields (poor workers) and Braamfontein, situated north-west of the town centre; immigrant miners in the east, south and west so that they could walk to work every day; black migrant workers were relegated to compounds near mines; and the rich mining magnates were attracted by "the variety in the landscape of the hills and the larger residential stands in the north and north-east" (*Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* 1986:42).[8] Another segment of Afrikaners were the "poor whites" (former transport-riders) that were left unemployed in 1889 by the new railway system. The government tried to alleviate their situation by granting them free land at Vrededorp (near Braamfontein) and promising employment on the mines (Leyds 1964:34). The 'poor whites' were later joined by farmers from rural areas who could not withstand the long droughts, locust plagues, and *rinderpest*.[9]

Before the Transvaal was annexed as a British colony the population of Johannesburg realised that the gold deposits of the Rand would not be depleted after a few years and that a railway system was imperative. Heavy machinery was needed to delve deeper and ox wagons were not capable of handling such enormous loads. The Afrikaners had various preconceived ideas about the railway system and machinery. They believed that the railway was an "invention by the devil" and that railway workers were always drunk, lived with "Native women and were generally immoral" (Leyds 1964:64). The railway workers also brought with them "concomitants of imperialism" such as heavy machinery, guns and heavy cases of ammunition, and the Afrikaners believed that their freedom was

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[8] Keith Beavon (2000:2) states that the northern suburbs became Parktown which served as "a clutch of mansions but became the apex of the main wedge of what would later be known as the northern suburbs".
[9] *Rinderpest* is a lethal and highly infectious viral disease of cattle and livestock. This disease is also known as cattle plague or steppe murrain.

endangered by the new railway system (Leyds 1964:64).[10] Despite objections, President Kruger realised that a railway system was needed to increase the Transvaal's revenue and according to Leyds (1964:60-62), "the iron horse was never more appreciated than in time of drought and scarcity of fodder," and because the Transvaal was plagued by drought and the constant demand for machinery.[11]

Although the forming years were a very uncertain time for all its inhabitants – the miners did not know for how long the gold deposits would last and the Anglo-Boer War also left the mining community shaken – the large mining houses "knew better than anyone how long the Reef would last" and to calm the mining community they started to build "expensive 'skyscrapers" to assure the future of the town (Leyds 1964:23). The mining magnates thus contributed to the architectural history of Johannesburg by erecting buildings such as the new Corner House of nine storeys (Figure 13), built by the Rand Mines Group on the corner of Simmonds and Commissioner Streets, which signified the end of the mining-camp days.[12]

Figure 13: David Goldblatt, *The Corner House, Joburg's first skyscraper, headquarters of Rand Mines, On Simmonds, corner Commissioner*, 1965. Silver gelatin photograph on fibre-based paper, 50 x 40 cm. (http://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/davidgoldblatt).

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[10] Achille Mbembe (2003:25) states that "each stage of imperialism involved certain key technologies [such as] colonial railroads".
[11] The first train arrived in Johannesburg on 15 September 1892 (Leyds 1964:62).
[12] Tall skyscrapers, of which some stood nine storeys tall, "symbolised the financial power of the private sector [and] instead of the medieval cathedrals which graced cities of Europe, Johannesburg had mining houses" (*Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* 1986:48).

From 1890 to 1900 there was relative economic prosperity and Johannesburg evolved from a mining camp to a mining town. The migrant nature of society evaporated and in its place a strong confidence in the future was reflected in bold, permanent architecture.

From 1900 until 1910 the architecture of Johannesburg started to reflect a different character under Lord Milner's influence and due to the impact of being a British colony. According to *Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* (1986:46), the British wanted to emphasise their power and dominance and the city space changed into a

> rapid territorial expansion with firm and clear boundaries ... parks and gardens were securely fenced in ... simplification of buildings forms to establish a clear contrast between buildings and the natural environment [and later] architecture began to dominate the landscape.

An example of the architecture that dominated at the time are the mansions of the mining magnates which were built on top of hills to command a view of the surroundings, and were painted white in order for them to stand out against the landscape.[13] Keith Beavon (2000:2) furthermore points out that the northern suburbs where the rich mining magnates resided "lay beyond the then lines of public transport" such as railway tracks and busy streets. The bourgeoisie of Johannesburg who had their own transport (cars) was removed from the industrialised city whereas the proletariat had to reside in close proximity to public transport lines as they depended on public transport to take them to the mines.[14]

It becomes clear from the above discussion that both Afrikaner and foreign (mining magnates and British) ideologies shaped the material, spatial and architectural history of Johannesburg. As a preface to the next section, which deals with the authoritarian nature of Johannesburg, it has to be noted that both the Afrikaners and British contingents contributed to the oppression of the black population who was forced to live in compounds. Although there was tension between *burgers* and foreigners, racial

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[13] According to John Gulick (1989:109), "early suburbanisation involved the great separation of place of residence (suburban) from place of work (city centre)" and suburbs denoted "a level of affluence that only industrial cultures possess".

[14] In 1896 Mr. John Percy Hess of Pretoria imported a Benz "Velo" from Benz & Co. of Mannheim, Germany. The car arrived in Pretoria on 4 January 1897 and the car was sold to Mr. AH Jacobs, a coffee importer from Johannesburg (Dynaconsult 2010:[sp]).

discrimination against black migrant workers was rife. Leyds (1964:281) states as soon as Johannesburg was laid out for "Europeans, an area was set apart as a 'location' for the Natives." This was also in line with the Transvaal Government's policy to keep urban blacks in locations or townships near towns or cities. The gold mines also adapted the compound[15] system where all black and coloured workers as well as workers of Asian origin lived in an enclosure in which their huts or rooms stood in rows. Black labourers were also employed as "houseboys, nursemaids, workers in factories, street cleaners, builders" and became an integral part of the city (Leyds 1964:288). As Leyds (1964:288) notes, "life in Johannesburg could not continue for the white population without the labour of the Bantu population". Because Johannesburg relied on migrant labour the *Volksraad*[16] started implementing Pass Laws in 1890 which "purported to regulate the movements of Natives according to the wishes of their employers" (Leyds 1964:288).

Johannesburg is clearly a city that found its life-source in migrant labourers. In return for their labour, the city allowed "natives and their families to come from the relatively primitive but clean kraal to the hurly-burly, the squalor, the filth and vice of modern civilisation's complex slumdom [sic]" (Leyds 1964:290). Black, coloured and Asian inhabitants, with no political voice, were submitted to racialised and discriminatory practices as expressed by the Native Economic Commission in 1932, states Leyds (1964:291):

> the town was created by the white man, belongs to him and him alone. Natives are needed for unskilled work, but any in excess of the number so needed are 'redundant' and must be prevented or removed by authorities. They can be given no vote in the administration or in any elections. The natives are not capable of supporting white civilisation, and therefore their wives and children must, if possible, be prevented from coming to the Rand.

The racial discriminatory ideology of both Afrikaner and English colonisers thus created a city that was exclusive in nature: whites had automatic access to the marvels of 'modernity' and the spoils of capitalism, whereas black, coloured and Asian people could only fulfil the role of migrant labourer, whose body was controlled, exploited and

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[15] The word compound is derived from the Malay word *kampong*.
[16] Translated directly, the *Volksraad* means the People's Councill. The *Volksraad* was the parliament of the former Zuid-Afrikaanse Republiek (1856-1902).

oppressed. The separatist spatial organisation of Johannesburg was enforced along ideological lines, giving birth to an authoritarian city which was spatially divided and segregated along both racial and socioeconomic lines.

3.3   The Janus-faced city: an authoritarian history

The focus of this section is to illustrate that a city like Johannesburg can be analysed as being both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct if one focuses on segregation policies and the establishment of black townships. Both these frameworks (or constructs) have systems that control and subjugate people in different ways: the authoritarian city is characterised by racial segregation and the post-authoritarian city excludes people along socioeconomic lines. It can furthermore be argued that cities are based on capitalist principles which, in turn, result in the marginalisation of various groups of people.
In order to come to some understanding of the nature of Johannesburg one has to frame the city within a specific historical context. The contextual timeframe in which Johannesburg is examined as an authoritarian construct is therefore from 1890 to 1994. During this timeframe various political and ideological stimuli shaped Johannesburg into a city whose character is strict, controlling, rigid, undemocratic, and dictatorial.

By examining the timeframe in which South Africa is situated, light is shed on various colonial influences. In brief: from 1652 the Cape Colony was under Dutch colonial rule until the British colonised this region in 1815. Due to the oppressive impact of British rule the Afrikaners (Boers) embarked on the Great Trek in the 1820s. The Afrikaners occupied two territories, namely the Free State which was governed by them from 1854 to 1902, and the Transvaal province from 1856 to 1877 and 1881 to 1902. In 1900 the Transvaal was annexed by the United Kingdom and on 31 May 1902 the treaty of Vereeniging was signed indicating the Afrikaners' surrender to the British. In 1961 South Africa became an independent republic and once again white Afrikaners, in the form of the Nationalist Party, spearheaded the government until 1994.

As Johannesburg was founded in 1886 the first rulers of the city was the Paul Kruger government. During this time the city was controlled in accordance with Afrikaner ideals such as segregation based on nationality. The class structure of the time, as chronicled by AJ Christopher and James Tarver (1994:41), was as follows: Afrikaners (Boers), who were regarded as the rightful owners of the land, were the ruling class; foreigners such as immigrant miners had no vote and were regarded as a threat to the government; and native blacks were exploited and seen as subordinates. Before 1910 the four colonies adopted different policies toward the management of multi-ethnic urban populations. The Transvaal and Orange Free State's republican governments adopted rigidly racial constitutions: only whites could become citizens and only they could own land. Christopher and Tarver (1994:41) state that in theory, "African and other people of colour were confined to locations on the margins of the white-occupied towns". As illustration of the above segregation practices, *Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* (1986:54) states, the first black townships or locations were laid out in the 1890s and these areas were close to the town centre and surrounded by predominantly white areas.

This early 'authoritarian' city also demanded obedience from its black population and from all foreigners. To control the influx of black migrant labourers during the mining years, strict pass laws were implemented to control the movement of the growing black population. Political obedience was also required from the heterogeneous population leading to the suppression of any form of resistance against the state. According to Christopher and Tarver (1994:42), these controlling spatial practices combined with strict political governance left South African towns and cities during the founding of the Union in 1910 in a "highly segregated" state.

The second development of Johannesburg's authoritarian history became apparent in 1902 when the British annexed the Transvaal. The British rulers continued with the spatial segregation practices established by the Kruger government and as early as 1904 a new black area was set aside at Klipspruit, south of Johannesburg's city centre. In terms of an Act of 1903, the Municipality was obligated to apply strict residential segregation (*Johannesburg – One Hundred Years* 1986:54).

Not only did this new wave of British colonialism influence the political governance of South Africa, it also played a role in the formation of South Africa's new industrial cities.[17] A turning point in this phase was that the concept of urban areas as 'the domain of the white man' was challenged when African urbanisation accelerated after World War I, when thousands of migrants flocked to South Africa's industrial hubs, and had to be housed in and around cities. Christopher and Tarver (1994:47) argue that the colonial city was forced to take on a new character and "the result was the creation of a new form of city, distinguished from its ... predecessors by greater rigidity and coercion."

Mining industries, railways and other industries were developed on a large scale and as a result thousands of white and black people moved to industrial hubs such as Johannesburg to seek employment. As Johannesburg can be regarded as a colonial city it must be emphasised that colonial cities were built by Europeans for Europeans and exemplified their ideals. The British followed in the footsteps of the Boer government in terms of racial segregation practices and thus the township of Orlando was created in 1932 to enforce "slum clearance of the town" (Leyds 1964:292). Leyds (1964:292) furthermore observes that this "policy of segregation was implemented decades before 'apartheid' became the slogan". It becomes clear from Leyds' (1964:292) description of these segregation policies that the ruling white classes believed their supremacist ideology was just.

In light of the above, it is important to emphasise that authoritarian policies entail the subjugation of subordinate classes through state apparatuses (to use Althusser's phrase) such as the judiciary system. One such policy, the Stallard Commission of 1922, restricted the number of Africans in order for the state to minimise and decrease the expenditure on black locations. The essence of 'Stallardism' is summarised by Anthony Lemon and Gillian Cook (1994:320) as: "the native should only be allowed to enter the urban areas, which are essentially the White man's creation, when he is willing to enter

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[17] Gulick (1989:81) as well as Christopher and Tarver (1994:33) argue that South Africa is more urbanised than the rest of Africa because of "special conditions" such as: there is "no indigenous urban tradition and a strongly exploitative colonial tradition extended into the present by means of extreme social segregation enforced by the minority of South Africans who are of European ancestry".

and minister to the needs of the White man, and should depart therefrom [sic] when he ceases so to minister". Furthermore, the Stallardist principles were also embodied in the 1923 Natives (Urban Areas) Act which made way for segregation, the relocation (and forceful removal) and influx control of people of colour (blacks, coloureds and Asians). As a consequence of this Act, the Johannesburg City Council served blacks living in New Doornfontein with notices that they should evacuate the area and relocate to Orlando – leading to the displacement of hundreds of black inhabitants (Leyds 1964:293).

The third important event in the timeline of the authoritarian city is the establishment of apartheid in 1948. Apartheid's chief contribution to the spatial character of Johannesburg was the establishment of demarcated black townships. Christopher and Tarver (1994:40) state that the origins of the apartheid policy "go deep into the colonial period and indeed into the early English colonial experience". Black townships (as products of both colonialism and apartheid)[18] were, and still are, located at the peripheries of cities, and precisely because of their location, white rulers could maintain racial domination. Fassil Demissie (2004:487) states that the "theory of racial superiority to construct ... racially exclusive housing and townships" was a "final solution to the urban 'native problem' in South Africa", that ensured "the spatial control of African workers and their families in times of crises (e.g. riots, uprising and strikes)". Townships were close to cities for the ruling classes' comfort – labour was always at hand – and also conveniently out of sight.

Architecture and the planning of urban space are often used to express the state's ideology. In South Africa, instead of creating houses and communities where black people could run their own affairs free from interference by the state,

> permanently urbanised African workers living in the burgeoning squalor of shanty settlements and locations, sharply exposed the principle of orderly segregationist urban space (Demissie 2004:492).

Lemon and Cook (1994:321) chronicle how black urbanisation and the National Party's ideological agenda were intertwined since 1948 until the late 1990s: in the 1948 elections

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[18] During colonialism and apartheid black people were relegated into "a third zone between subjecthood and objecthood," argues Mbembe (2003:26) and townships became the zones in which black people were controlled and regulated. Mbembe (2003:26) furthermore states that townships were "a peculiar spatial institution scientifically planned for the purpose of control".

the National Party used its *swart gevaar*[19] (black danger) arguments to win people over, as many "whites were alarmed by the dramatic growth of urban African numbers" and saw the black population as a threat to their way of life. Furthermore, under apartheid it was thought that Africans 'belonged' in their Bantustans, and they were a "necessary evil [only their labour could make a positive contribution to white society] whose numbers should be minimised and whose presence should be tightly controlled" (Lemon & Cook 1994:321). Linked to the notion of authority and control is Jordache Ellapen's (2007:115) account of legislature that contributed to the divided character of the city: the 1950 Group Areas Act enacted strict separation of the South African population into separate residential areas based on skin colour and controlled the purchase and occupation of land. Ellapen (2007:115) states

> Afrikaner Nationalism recognised the ideological importance of space and set out on a campaign which clearly demarcated the different races in South Africa placing them into different zones to enjoy different privileges.

To further the Nationalist Party's goals, the 1951 Illegal Squatting Act as well as the 1954 Native Resettlement Act were implemented which were aimed at the removal of peri-urban squatting blacks who were seeking employment or were already employed in nearby towns, and these Acts led to the removal of long-established black communities in western Johannesburg.[20] According to Ellapen (2007:115), township space also became synonymous with poverty, the underclass and "being characterised by violence, criminality and decay. Afrikaner Nationalism was responsible for stereotyping this space in order to mobilise a discourse of 'otherness'".

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[19] Marks Chabedi (2003:359) mentions the use of this metaphor, and states that racial metaphors "successfully articulated and combined the interests of different Afrikaner classes". Chabedi (2003:359) continues that because whites were afraid that greater dependence "on African labour would lead to the demise of white supremacy", this metaphor was potent in mobilising whites to act against the so-called danger.

[20] Gulick (1989:77) states that "demolition and replacement characterise urban evolution" and the forceful removal and relocation of black communities were part of apartheid's spatial strategies to rid the 'white' city of black inhabitants. Black communities which occupied land earmarked for industrial developments were also removed and their homes were replaced by "innovative structures ... which are directly related to industry and industrialised commerce", through which the state could benefit financially (Gulick 1989:77). From this it is clear that cities are firmly placed within a capitalist framework and therefore ruling classes exploit subordinates solely for their own financial gain.

During the 1960s migration and urbanisation led to the overpopulation of the city. Black migrant workers "became increasingly involved in the money economy" and the authoritarian city started to confine black communities more rigidly and existing townships were extended (Gulick 1989:82). This marked the "damming up of African urbanisation behind artificial boundaries" and created "increasingly disembodied apartheid cities or urban functional regions" (Lemon & Cook 1994:322). Figure 14 substantiates the argument that Johannesburg had to deal with a large influx of African migrant workers which in turn resulted in a schizophrenic controlling of space along racial lines.

Figure 14: David Goldblatt, *Migrant mineworkers who had served their contracts on the gold mines and were waiting for a train to take them part-way to their homes in Nyassaland (Malawi), Mayfair railway station, December 1952*, 1952.
Silver gelatin photograph on fibre-based paper, 30 x 40 cm.
(http://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/davidgoldblatt).

Twenty years later, in 1986, the Abolition of Influx Control Act, which provided for the total repeal of the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1945, represented the reversal of the

most hated apartheid policies including pass laws and the migrant labour system, "which had long forced the splitting of families, interrupted the urban experience of Africans, and made most of them insecure" (Lemon & Cook 1994:333). In the early 1990s, as a sign of early reconciliation, FW de Klerk removed the Group Areas, Land and Population Registration acts because of its "radically discriminatory urbanisation" policies (Lemon & Cook 1994:333).

The contributions various groups made to Johannesburg's authoritarian past can therefore be summarised as follows: the Boers controlled the city with its heterogeneous population based on their nationality and political stance. Paul Kruger realised the potential that gold mines could make to the province's revenue and thus the foreign and black inhabitants were subjected to strict control to minimise the threat of resistance toward the state. The Transvaal government did not, however, rule long enough to make drastic changes to the spatial character of the city. More rigid control and domination of the indigenous population was, however, exercised during the British period, as Johannesburg was an important bastion of Her Majesty's empire owing to the mineral riches of the province. Johannesburg expanded rapidly during British rule and their contributions to the spatial character of the city were colonial style architecture and the establishment of the first native locations.

After this period, the National Party applied the apartheid ideology to cities and black people were stringently controlled due to large scale urbanisation. During the apartheid period racist ideologies thus sculpted city spaces to create divided, fragmented entities. Figure 15 visually illustrates the separatist nature of the authoritarian city in 1964: black commuters are on their way to take a train to Soweto, while white Johannesburgers head home to the Northern suburbs.

Throughout Johannesburg's authoritarian history the city was an entity where subordinate classes and races were excluded. As this research focuses on train surfers and the spatial framework in which they function, one can assume that township dwellers may have lived in black townships and informal settlements for generations as they were restricted

from inhabiting other spaces during Johannesburg's authoritarian period. The exclusion has therefore been passed from one generation to the next, creating dysfunctional citizenship because they were not allowed to act as full citizens in the city as they were relegated to a subordinate role. And by confining black people to compounds, townships and squatter camps, the ruling classes took away their agency by restricting their movements and denying them access to participate in social, cultural and political activities that took place in the city.

Figure 15: David Goldblatt, *Evening exodus from the city. Blacks stream to Westgate station for trains to Soweto; Whites, in their cars, head for the Northern suburbs, Johannesburg*, 1964.
Silver gelatin photograph, 30 x 45 cm.
(http://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/davidgoldblatt).

To attain an understanding of whether Johannesburg's spatial construct still dictates rigid control of its citizen's movements and dwelling sectors, I now turn to the current post-authoritarian period.

3.4   Post-authoritarian Johannesburg: shifting boundaries

Certain key elements are intrinsic to Johannesburg's post-authoritarian composition. The first element is the influence of the ANC government's ideological position that is based on ideals such as equality, openness and the promise of a better future. Figure 16 depicts the notion that the ideology of democracy is perpetuated in both the political and visual rhetoric present in post-authoritarian South Africa. This perpetuation has resulted in the tendency that all South African cities must be portrayed as being the opposite of former 'apartheid' cities.

Figure 16: Santu Mofokeng, *Democracy is forever, Pimville*, 2004.
Silverprint, measurements not supplied.
(http://cargocollective.com/santumofokeng/filter/work#660075/billboards).

At the same time memorials are built in commemoration of liberation heroes to remind inhabitants of the past and to engage in a new political (and spatial) dialogue. A third contributing factor that is changing the face of Johannesburg is white flight from the city centre and industrial areas, which is indicated by a northbound urban sprawl. Today the

white population and business owners are faced with so-called new 'threats' such as African migrants and the rising black middle-class. As these two groups occupy the city centre and formerly 'white' suburbs, gated communities with armed guards have been formed to protect mainly white people and to keep the insurgence of violence and crime at bay. The question then remains, how is the post-authoritarian city different from its predecessor and does it still exclude certain sectors of the South African population?

To examine post-authoritarian Johannesburg the discussion turns to the ANC as the founders of post-authoritarianism and how their ideology has shaped urban space. After the fall of apartheid in 1994 the ANC government, with their own ideological and political agenda, promised to create a 'new' city that was not exclusive in nature. In an attempt to embark on a new, inclusive spatial strategy, the strict ordering and planning of spaces, which divided different races and ethnicities – the process of defining and controlling the 'other' – collapsed. The collapse of these dividing meta-narratives brought with it significant changes in the social, cultural, economic, and political fabric of everyday life.[21] Linday Bremmer (2004a:459) writes that "geographies of boundary and space," which contained anxiety, atrocities and fear were broken and overturned, urban spaces became "open to infiltration, intervention and contamination" rendering city space as an "unbounded, uncontained, and open-ended body". Post-authoritarian Johannesburg is thus a city that tries to move away from being an oppressed space, to a space where movement and people are free.

Other characteristics intrinsic to post-authoritarian South African cities are sustainable development and the alleviation of poverty. Loren Landau (2007:62) notes that the Gauteng Provincial Government produced a paper, *Growth and Development Strategy* (2005), in which they set out guidelines to create sustainable communities and strategies to decrease poverty by 50% in Johannesburg. The aim of this strategy, writes Landau (2007:62), is to create a post-authoritarian Johannesburg through building relationships between all sectors of society to ensure that the benefits of economic growth is extended to all people living in Johannesburg, and to create a better life for all people. Although

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[21] As Erik Swyngedouw and Maria Kaïka (2003:6) state: "post-modernism ... has fundamentally redrawn the time-space co-ordinates of everyday life and re-articulated the local and global to form a new geo-political and geo-economic ordering".

one must applaud these lofty ideals, in reality these ideals have not yet trickled down to the people, who live in townships and informal settlements, that desperately need spatial and economic rejuvenation.

In concurrence with the above, Edgar Pieterse (2006:286) states that although various projects are on their way to construct new cities and new legislation tries to break strict urban segregation policies, post-apartheid architecture and space, unfortunately, stay "trapped in its apartheid form". If this is the case, one might argue that South Africans still navigate and experience urban space based on prior knowledge and experience (that they might have accumulated during the apartheid era). Citizens might feel that certain areas of the city are still 'no-go areas': townships might still be perceived as dangerous places and the northern suburbs might still be seen as areas reserved exclusively for the privileged. While there is no legislation in place to prevent citizens from occupying certain spaces, citizens might still navigate urban space based on previously determined spatial segregationist norms. This could explain why the notion of a non-restrictive and free city is still in its embryonic phases: preconceived ideas are hard to eradicate and although South Africa has been a democracy for 17 years, other counterproductive elements threaten the unified identity of South African cities.

Of these counterproductive elements inequality, high levels of unemployment and spatial segregation are the most important. South African cities are therefore facing an ambiguous crisis. Although the city can be regarded as 'open-ended', it is still bounded by the unequal distribution of wealth across the population, resulting in the exclusion and marginalisation of citizens based on their economic position. Pieterse (2006:286) states "South African cities remain beacons of racialised inequality and, perversely, it seems as if the unintended consequence of post-1994 governmental policies is a worsening of the situation".[22] The current government is faced with a mammoth task to curb poverty and unemployment and if these factors are not addressed, Johannesburg's spatial character

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[22] Sarah Nuttall (2004:731) argues in a similar vain by stating, "not much has changed in South Africa since the end of apartheid ... many of the inequalities of the past remain in place, particularly for the poor in South Africa". Susan Parnell (2005:20) furthermore emphasises the lack of change by stating, "South African cities are more unequal today than ten years ago".

will never escape its disparate form. The issue of poverty is visually narrated by the artist, David Goldblatt. Figure 17 is an abstract depiction of poverty in Johannesburg. It is an aerial photograph of the township, Diepsloot. The choice to depict the sprawling township from the air, hints at the notion that poverty is still viewed from afar by many affluent South Africans.

Figure 17: David Goldblatt, *Diepsloot, 15 August 2009*, 2009a.
Digital print in pigment inks on 100% cotton rag paper, measurements not supplied.
(http://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/davidgoldblatt).

Figure 18: David Goldblatt, *Mrs. Miriam Mazibuko watering her garden, Extension 8, Far East Alexandra township, Johannesburg*, 2006.
Digital print on 100% cotton rag paper, measurements not supplied.
(http://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/davidgoldblatt).

Figure 18 shows a woman, Miriam Mazibuko, watering her garden in the township of Alexandra. The photograph's composition – the isolated position of the dwelling with the tiny corrugated iron shacks and the graveyard in the background – creates a feeling of barrenness and separation. The photographer has taken a 'long shot' of the scenery that further evokes a feeling of distance. These two photographs clearly illustrate that the notion of Johannesburg and its surrounding township being 'one' city is paradoxical. Townships, where Johannesburg's underclass lives, is clearly amputated from the spatial rejuvenation propagated by the ruling party.

One way in which the ANC intends to differentiate Johannesburg from its authoritarian predecessor is to narrate and engage with the past through the construction of memorials, monuments and museums. The once militarised space of Soweto can now be examined as an archaeological site with its core exemplifying the signs of colonial segregation, layered over this is the militant site of the 1980s, and now newly built memorials and museums form the outer epidermis of the space, making Soweto easily accessible to foreigners as part of the "struggle tourist circuit", explains Gary Baines (2006:19).[23]

Another material example of rewriting history is the Constitution Hill heritage site that is situated on the premises of the Old Fort prison.[24] This prison housed Boer fighters during the Anglo Boer war, Indian activists during the Passive Resistance Campaign and black freedom fighters during the apartheid era. The site embodies the potential of a place of memory that links different races to various historical events. The link is physically and symbolically juxtaposed through the prison, as site of abuses of the past, and the Constitutional Court (Figure 19), as hope for the future. As it is impossible to erase a nation's history and all its colonial architecture, it seems likely that the ghostly remains of apartheid will always be part of the layers of the post-authoritarian city.[25]

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[23] Jean Comaroff (2004:2) states that sites like Soweto and the Hector Pieterson memorial have become some of the "most evocative sites on a new cartography of popular struggle". And the notion of attracting tourists has become an integral part of the rhetoric of establishing and developing post-apartheid 'community'" (Comaroff 2004:13).

[24] As Alan Cobley (2001:618) states, for many practitioners of South African history it seemed "that there must be a new history to complement the new South Africa".

[25] Nuttall (2004:732) writes "apartheid social engineering did and still does work to fix spaces that are difficult to break down in the present".

Figure 19: Exterior of the Constitutional Court, Johannesburg, 2007.
Photograph by the author.

The fear and exclusion of new marginalised figures is the third noticeable element of present-day Johannesburg that is in a certain sense reminiscent of its undemocratic past. Although apartheid has been dismantled there are "new politics of closure, the identification of new figures on which to project and expel ... and the emergence of new techniques of exclusion and withdrawal" (Bremmer 2004a:460). It is argued that township space and the marginalisation of AIDS sufferers, train surfers, and the poor is part of the new politics of closure in post-authoritarian Johannesburg. The city was and still remains a melting pot of repressed fears and anxieties and as Brenda Yeoh (2001:460) states:

> The city is by definition a space of encounters with difference, and therefore 'the visual space of the political,' it has become the 'visual symbol of post-colonialism, both meeting place and battleground for two opposed worlds, with their contrasting features: power and impotence, poverty and ease, new immigrants and old inhabitants, centre and fringe.

Just as the city expels new figures such as foreigners, the poor and the diseased, the changing geographical layout and composition of Johannesburg has promoted different forms of fears and anxieties. The most evident changes to Johannesburg's landscape are expanding townships and informal settlements, the decaying city centre and its sprawling

northern suburbs.[26] Charlotte Lemanski, Karina Landman and Matthew Durington (2008:141) chronicle the spatial history of post-authoritarian Johannesburg as follows: the late 1980s saw the slow demise of the apartheid state as well as the repeal of the Group Areas Act which both led to the reorganisation of South African city space.[27] Today Johannesburg has a growing black middle-class who is moving out of township areas into either inner-city neighbourhoods or formerly white middle-class suburbs. The character of the inner-city has also changed dramatically. During apartheid white residents lived in the inner-city precinct, but after the fall of apartheid, blacks, other people of colour and African immigrants started moving into the inner-city.

The arrival of black families, the influx of African migrants and illegal immigrants resulted in "white and business flight" from the inner-city (Lemanski et. al. 2008:141). Lemanski et. al.'s interesting word choice, "flight," connotes feelings of the need to escape, to depart, or to flee from a perceived threat, risk or danger. In this case the groups that feel 'threatened' by the rising black middle class, African immigrants, and criminals are white residents and white business owners. This drainage of people from the inner-city has led to the expansion of the northern suburbs through new developments such as shopping malls, as well as gated communities and large sectional title developments.[28] Edge cities such as Midrand were established and businesses started to leave the Central Business District (CBD) of Johannesburg to accommodate the increasing demand of office blocks and industrial parks in the northern suburbs, and thus Johannesburg's CBD is slowly becoming a ghost-like sector with numerous empty buildings. As this section

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[26] The contrast between the city centre and the northern suburbs is described by Beavon (2000:6) as the "lily-white mink-and-manure belt (of the north)" versus "the decaying city centre [which might be seen] as an example of the inability of black people to govern". Denis McElrath (1980:221) also states that the city centre is home to "those who could not join the exodus of the middle-income families to the suburbs", as well as the "accumulated poor, the newly arrived poor ... and other minorities who cannot move because of the straightjacket of discrimination".

[27] Owen Crankshaw (2008:1695) also traces the spatial history of Johannesburg and similarly concludes that Johannesburg was arranged according to the North-South divide which was established "during the decades immediately after the Second World War" when races were segregated by law. This division operated along occupational and class lines: the northern suburbs were inhabited by the middle-class, normally white, professional workers; the southern neighbourhoods housed the working class, normally black, semi-skilled, artisans and manual labourers. Cranshaw (2008:1696) points out that this division has gradually faded since the 1970s and the end of apartheid due to "black upward mobility" and the establishment of a black middle-class.

[28] Beavon (2000:7) similarly notes that "central-city decline and decay has been matched by the new suburbanisation that creates greater divisions between rich and poor, and between whites and other races".

deals with the complexities of post-apartheid Johannesburg along with the differences and similarities with its authoritarian past, the focus now shifts to new ways of exercising control over city dwellers.

3.4.1   Urbanism and new forms of control

One way in which residents of Johannesburg are exerting new forms of territorial control and suppressing their fears and anxieties, is through the practice of gating communities and neighbourhoods. The need to gate spaces can also be seen as a failure of government who cannot curb the increasing crime rate, and gating thus forces individuals to turn to private companies to guard their safety.[29] Gated communities also affect the spatiality of cities as they exclude individuals based along socio-economic lines that, in turn, lead to the fragmentation of the city. [30] Lemanski et. al. (2008:134) state that gated communities are criticised for "creating exclusionary spaces increasing residential segregation, restricting freedom of movement and exacerbating social divides". [31] In addition these gated communities diminish urban integration and inclusion and like its controlling authoritarian predecessor, present-day Johannesburg enforces separation and inequality through the gating of communities.

The fact that only affluent citizens can afford to live in gated neighbourhoods further strengthens the argument that these clusters of prosperity divide and shatter the ideals of an inclusive city. The trend of moving to gated communities is labelled as "semigration" by Richard Ballard (quoted in Lemanski et. al. 2008:136), and means that "although citizens remain in South Africa rather than emigrate, they separate themselves from its

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[29] It must be noted that not only white middle-class South Africans fear and experience crime. Chabedi (2003:366) argues that everyday life in Soweto "takes place against the backdrop of escalating criminal violence". This is a direct result, Chabedi (2003:366) argues, of the breakdown of "traditional forms of solidarity and networks of trust" that were in place during the 1980s when comrades "imposed order ... against criminal elements".

[30] Beavon (2000:5) also states that the only "barrier to entering any residential area is price" which in reality creates "a form of *de facto* apartheid". And Cranshaw (2008:1698) states that "although the city is now more spatially unequal than before, racial segregation is probably in decline".

[31] Crankshaw (2008:1698) refers to gated or walled communities as "exclusionary enclave[s]". And Mbembe (2003:28) states that "suburban enclaves or gated communities" are characteristic of "splintering urbanism, characteristic of late modernity".

increasing 'African-ness' and create islands of modern Western culture in the midst of an African nation, albeit within walls and gates". In South Africa these communities are also class homogenous (middleclass) and they perpetuate "apartheid's Group Areas by enclaving whites (alongside a handful of wealthy blacks) into exclusive spaces and lifestyles which the vast majority of (black) residents are unable to access" (Lemanski et. al. 2008:149). Excluded citizens cannot access privately owned spaces such as gated communities without permission, which once again evokes an analogy with the past where passbooks were used to dictate the control of citizens. Two other paradoxes are present in modern Johannesburg: on the one hand the porous borders between township and city centre create spaces where the movement and habitation practices of migrants and black families are not strictly controlled, and on the other hand the city has impenetrable walls and boundaries of gated communities that not only safeguard the gated community's inhabitants against criminal elements, but also restrict free movement of ordinary citizens.

To contextualise the phenomenon of gated communities and the issue of crime, South Africa is placed within the framework of a transitional society. In transitional societies (such as Nigeria, Mozambique, Somalia, former communist countries, and countries in Latin America), the government wants to move away from its problematic past by implementing democratic policies. Mark Shaw (2002:1) analyses the link between crime and transitional societies and his article highlights their key features: the country is economically underdeveloped; it is slow in terms of modernisation; it is relatively poor in capital and technology; the country's political climate might be unstable; and reforms are needed whether it be social, political, or economic to usher the country into democracy. Transitional countries need to reform its social fabric to provide unity or to reduce division among social groups and political actors, and to improve democratic governance.

Transitional societies often fear criminal elements as criminals and perpetrators often exploit the transitional nature of the country while the government is struggling to cope with the implementation of new policies and laws. Due to the insurgence of crime, fear of

different races and social difference in transitional societies, gated communities are established to protect 'insiders' from 'outsiders', write Lemanski et. al. (2008:143).[32] This exclusion of people leads to spatial fragmentation and creates "private citadels" that dissect the city into "a series of bounded territories" (Lemanski et. al. 2008:143). This, in turn, forms a city that is separatist in nature with a fragmented morphology. The fragmented city, thus, stands in contrast to "egalitarian and social justice impulses crucial to post-apartheid visions" (Lemanski et. al. 2008:152). Linked to the fragmented nature of post-1994 Johannesburg are the townships and squatter settlements on the fringes of the city, that harbour excluded citizens and the underclass.

3.5   Marginal and hybrid spaces: townships and squatter settlements

The concept of marginality denotes that something is deemed insignificant, unimportant, irrelevant, ignored, and on the fringe of a sector. One may argue that townships and squatter settlements are perceived by the bourgeoisie as insignificant and the geographical location of townships is indeed on the fringes of large cities. It is therefore imperative to investigate what stimuli have formed townships and squatter settlements into marginal entities. The author argues that two major factors have contributed to the process of marginalising people and spaces: these are capitalism and urbanisation. When these factors are taken into consideration, it becomes evident that both factors have led to the exclusion of the poor (underclass) who, as a result, need to function in a social and spatial realm that is different to the rest of the city.

To substantiate the argument that marginalisation is a direct result of capitalism one can draw on Georg Simmel's work. Simmel (1980:21) maintains that "the metropolis has always been the seat of the money economy" and cities are "seats of the highest

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[32] Society fears what is deemed 'other' and society furthermore defends whichever place they see as belonging to them. The fear of foreigners "suggests a deep, existential apprehension over the meaning of belonging", writes Landau (2006:135). For many immigrants and migrants, "Johannesburg is a site of trade and transit" and not of belonging (Landau 2006:136). The mindset of not belonging immediately excludes foreigners from taking part in constructing and experiencing the city in a positive way. Migrants and immigrants are seen as "the permanent outsider or wanderer, distanced from all connections and commitments" (Landau 2006:136).

economic divisions of labour".[33] It is precisely the division of labour that has brought about the divisionary and exclusive nature of the city: the have-nots live in places with rudimentary facilities where lodging and rent is affordable (e.g. townships) and the affluent live in places that are tailored for the needs of this social class (e.g. neighbourhoods, gated communities and secure residential complexes). Simmel (1980:27) continues by stating that "city life has transformed the struggle with nature for livelihood into an inter-human struggle for gain, which here is not granted by nature but by other men". The city, thus, functions as the nucleus of capitalism where different classes need to compete for employment and housing. Private home ownership is not a common feature among poorer classes and they have to rely on private enterprises or the government for employment. Because the poor depend on other economic entities for their financial survival and they do not have the same 'monetary power' that other classes possess, they are, in effect, rendered voiceless and their plight is often ignored.

Since the city is seen as a product of capitalist modes of accumulation, where capitalism functions spatially, the city is divided into spaces for the rich and spaces for the poor (Schmid 1995:252; Crankshaw 2008:1695). Mbembe (2004:384) notes that the geographical layout and ordering of (authoritarian) Johannesburg can be defined "in the same terms as any other colonial city, as a rigid, segregated place divided between a centre (the white city) and peripheries and outskirts (the native locations)". Likewise, Laura Huey and Thomas Kemple (2007:2306) state that homelessness and poverty are global social conditions associated with "material deprivation and downward social mobility" which have been "historically linked to specific populations living within distinct social and physical spaces" such as black townships and squatter settlements. Nuttall and Mbembe (2005:194) also examine this phenomenon and state: "pockets of privilege coexist with misery" referring to leafy white suburbs on the one hand, and poor black townships on the other.

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[33] For Schmid (1995:245) it is "capitalist social institutions [which] produce both poverty and the crime that arises from ... poverty". In Mbembe's view (2004:373), the "Western imagination defines the metropolis as the general form assumed by the rationalisation of relations of production (the increasing prevalence of the commodity system) and the rationalisation of the social sphere (human relations)". And in the metropolis the constant buying and selling of labour and commodities, results in "the liquidation of tradition and its substitution by a culture of indifference and restlessness that nourishes self-stylisation" (Mbembe 2004:374).

Post-capitalism furthermore functions through strict class structures in order to keep the ruling classes (affluent) in power and therefore the poor must be controlled. In Johannesburg the subordination of 'lower' classes occurred through the process of containing the 'underclass' in demarcated areas such as townships and limiting their participation in the economic sphere through exploitation. Throughout Johannesburg's history the majority of poor people have been, and still are, black Africans. The black people's struggle to survive financially in the city can be traced to Johannesburg's authoritarian past when migrant labourers had to work for meager salaries. The psychological impact of exclusion and marginalisation on migrant workers is explored by Gulick (1989). Gulick (1989:122) draws on Janice Perlman's (1976) book on squatters in Rio de Janeiro and who states that migrants are "uprooted individuals ... who live in filth and squalor ... and the squatters become highly pessimistic and fatalistic. They show total inability to defer gratification or plan for the future".

In Johannesburg exclusion takes place through processes that are linked to capitalism: citizens are expelled to townships and places of 'no importance' based on socio-economic class and race. It is also true that the poor, diseased, and 'socially delinquent' are pushed to the fringes or margins of society. The notion that townships can be classified as marginal spaces is shared by Rob Shields (1991:4) who defines marginal space as:

> the social definition of marginal spaces and places is intimately linked with the categorisation of objects, practices, ideas and modes of social interaction as belonging to the 'Low culture,' the culture of marginal places and spaces, the culture of the marginalised.

Although many township and squatter settlement residents may try to establish some sense of belonging and community among themselves, and thus see these places as home, William Mangin (1980:363) writes that squatter settlements on the outskirts of towns "arouse[d] great alarms, particularly among the more affluent city dwellers and government authorities". Many different readings have been given of squatter settlements and their inhabitants and Mangin (1980:363) summarises these readings as follows: middle-class and upper-class observers regard these settlements as "virulent social disease"; politicians and the police see them as "dangerous defiance of law and order";

conservatives are certain they are "seedbeds of revolution and communism"; city planners and architects view them as "ineffective users of urban real estate and as sores on the landscape"; and newspapers treat them as "centres of crime and delinquency". From these definitions it can be deduced that various social agents classify townships (and indirectly township dwellers) as places that exist opposite to the productive city, entities that convey a sense of difference, and places that are 'othered.' The sum total of these interpretations, thus, clearly suggests that townships are marginal places. Mangin's summary of interpretations regarding townships is visually substantiated by Santu Mofokeng's stark black and white photographs. Figures 20 and 21 respectively depict scenes from the neighbourhoods of Kliptown and Dube in Soweto during the 1980s. Figure 20 depicts a dilapidated house connoting extreme poverty and a dwelling that is aesthetically unattractive (the crumbling facade looks like a wart or sore on the landscape); and Figure 21 is reminiscent of *film noir*: the trash-ridden alley looks dangerous and the boy urinating becomes symbolic of township dwellers who are perceived as being delinquent.

Figure 20: Santu Mofokeng, *House #40, Kliptown*, 1985.
Silverprint, measurements not supplied.
(http://cargocollective.com/santumofokeng/filter/work#663752/townships).

Figure 21: Santu Mofokeng, *Near Maponya's discount store, Dube*, 1987.
Silverprint, measurements not supplied.
(http://cargocollective.com/santumofokeng/filter/work#663752/townships).

The second factor that has contributed to the marginal status of townships is urbanisation. Marginality, according to Gulick (1989:121), is associated with migrants and squatters in Third World cities. According to Denis McElrath (1980:215), the impact of urbanisation is reflected in the "sprawling bidonvilles and shacktowns that surround the capital cities of new nations", and not only is urbanisation changing the face of cities, the process is "creating new distributions of demands and expectations; new hierarchies along which people are stratified and scarce resources are distributed; and new ecologies of settlement and activity". The difference between urbanisation in First World countries and Third World countries is that the former could support the influx of people through new trade routes, new industries and agriculture; the latter has grown rapidly and swelled with population, but "their economic base has not expanded in parallel manner ... their products are limited [and] agricultural surpluses dwindle as population increases faster than productivity" (McElrath 1980:216). This phenomenon leaves the new arrivals to the

city unabsorbed into the urban economy which results in growing unemployment. This also emphasises another important aspect of urbanisation: unabsorbed migrant labourers.

McElrath (1980:217) states that migrants are only "segmentally and temporarily involved in the urban way of life" and they are not only "marginally employed in the city, but they are also marginal members of a new urban community" who struggle to be accepted in the city and who are often stereotyped as bringers of disease and poverty. As the city is gradually saturated (in terms of housing and accommodation) migrant workers are compelled to seek shelter in townships or squatter settlements.

Gulick (1989:112) concurs that many squatter settlements are formed by migrants and poor people who move away from inner city slums. The inner city slum (e.g. Hilbrow) differs from townships or informal settlements (e.g. Soweto) because the slum is home to the most recent migrants or to the "hopelessly destitute" and is characterised by decay and is stagnant (Gulick 1989:112). Informal settlements on the other hand are gradually improved by the residents or through government initiatives. Residents of these settlements also build shelters with the most inexpensive materials (corrugated iron, tin, metal, bricks, sheets of plastic) and these shelters can be adapted to the family's needs, for example to incorporate a small shop or an additional bedroom.

This unsystematic 'improvement' of shelters, shacks and homes by using a myriad of different materials and the influx of African migrants, as well as other South African ethnicities ,to townships, introduces the next characteristic of townships: hybridity. The author argues that the term 'hybrid space' can mean a place that is situated within a specific spatial realm and contains mixed elements, for example, a fusion of different design elements or 'architectural styles' that are superimposed over one another, and/or a mixture of different races or ethnicities. As a result hybrid space cannot be classified as homogeneous as it is heterogeneous in terms of the ethnicities that live there as well as the types of houses, flats, hostels, and shacks that are built in townships. The only homogenous element present in townships is row upon row of RDP homes formerly known as 'matchbox houses'. Townships also differ from suburbs in that there is no

continuous layout or architectural heritage that binds the space together, leading to a sense of discontinuity: tarred streets suddenly become dirt roads and shacks mushroom between modest houses. This indicates that hybrid space is in essence 'other space' which moulds it into a paradox. Townships are different from the city centre, suburbs and neighbourhoods and although townships are located on the fringes of cities, Soweto can be seen as the centre of the periphery.

Ellapen (2007:113) explains the unique spatial position of townships and calls the spatial presence "a space of hybridity, an in-between space reflected through the intermediate position the township occupies in relation to the urban and rural spaces". The township can also be described as a construction of Afrikaner nationalist ideology which strived to separate blacks from whites, and part of this ideology was to construct "black identity and culture as pre-modern" (Ellapen 2007:114). According to this ideology, black culture could not be incorporated into the 'modern, urban city' because black people were regarded as 'rural' and uncivilised, incapable of advancing civilisation. Township space also generated several myths associated with otherness and township inhabitants were constructed as underdeveloped, poverty-stricken, unemployed, as well as "a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction" (Bhabha 1992:133).

For Ellapen (2007:116) township space is much more than just a marginal area, it is a "hybrid or ambivalent space, a threshold space of liminality and in-betweenness that positioned the black body between modernity (represented by the city landscape) and pre-modernity (represented by the rural areas)". [34] Ellapen's argument is based on the binary opposition of 'civilised' (modern) and 'uncivilised' (rural) and as such townships are deemed as neither rural nor modern, but existing between two worlds. The concept of

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[34] Bremmer (2004b:23) contributes to this argument of defining township space by stating, "there is simply no urban alternative to the rural space, but rather complex configurations of lived space, neither rural nor urban". The boundaries between what is deemed 'rural' and 'modern' are blurred in townships and suburbs surrounding Johannesburg. As Bremmer (2004b:24) states "in Soweto, people still cook with firewood, whereas in rural mud-plastered huts, electric stoves are used; chickens are slaughtered on the pavements of central-city suburbs, while a rural chief drives the latest BMW".

hybridity also suggests that the inhabitants are of mixed origin and of different cultures. [35] Ellapen (2007:125) furthermore states that hybridity is a term used to refer to the "mixing, fusion and assimilation of ideas and concepts that results in the formation of a 'third space'" (to use Bhabha's term).

To elaborate Katharyne Mitchell (1997:255) states "[the] third space of hybridity ... [has] been offered to the sacred altar of resistance as new sites of hope. These liminal spaces are theorised as important sites in the tactical war against dominant ideologies ... they are conceptualised as key sites of intervention in narratives of race and nation". As such township space and township inhabitants can be analysed through a more positive lens. This space, according to Harald Bauder and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro (2008:258), "mediates between the first space of concrete and material circumstances and the second space of mental and imagined representations [and it is this in-between space that] exposes practices of exclusion while offering possibilities for liberation". Because hybrid and liminal space expose dominant ideologies related to exclusion, it creates a "potential for resistance" writes Mitchell (1997:258).

Neill Blomkamp's science fiction film, *District 9* (2009), encapsulates the argument that townships space can be read as hybrid space and can be used as a meta-text to interpret the character of present day Soweto. The film was shot in Chiawelo, Soweto as well as Alexandra, and tells the story of aliens who are sequestered in a township after their spaceship was damaged over Johannesburg. The oppression suffered by the aliens can be read as a metaphor of the subjugation black South Africans endured during apartheid, and one could even extend the metaphor to the current oppression of the urban underclass and illegal immigrants in Johannesburg's townships and inner city precinct. The visual representation of Johannesburg's townships in the film (Figure 22) and the film's plot portray township space as hybrid. Firstly, there is the mixture of humans and aliens (humans are infected by the aliens and become aliens) and secondly, a fusion of futuristic

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[35] According to Asef Bayat (2000:536) migrants, immigrants and marginal figures are also closely associated to the concept of hybridity as a "marginal personality [is] a manifestation of cultural hybridity, living on the margin of two cultures without being a full member of either".

elements (the spaceship and futuristic technologies) and the rudimental structures of the township (corrugated iron shacks).

Figure 22: Video still, *District 9*, 2009.
(http://www.shockya.com/news/2009/08/17/cool-new-district-9-movie-stills/).

In light of the above theoretical explanations offered by Ellapen and Mitchell, space is read as a cultural, social and political construct. The township, thus, becomes a space that is never stagnant, but rather a space that is ever-changing and that in some ways resembles the past (the origins of its inhabitants and its spatial history), as well as the socio-political climate of the present day. The past frames a certain space within a historical context and lends it a distinctive character, but globalisation along with the influx of migrants (different cultures and ethnicities) perhaps obscure the specific context of a space/place thus rendering it hybrid. The township as a threshold suggests that it is an entry-point or port for immigrants and migrants who are mobile, moving between the township and (inner) city to find employment.

Because township space is read as marginal or hybrid, one can argue that space has an agency and, therefore, the capacity to wield power and influence subjects (e.g. township inhabitants). Therefore if a township like Soweto is analysed as a site of containment

(political construct during the authoritarian period), it can be deduced that its inhabitants engaged in a conscious struggle to be freed from the control of apartheid policies. Hereafter Soweto is briefly discussed as a place of struggle where inhabitants resisted and still resist dominant ideologies to produce meaningful lives.

3.5.1   Soweto as site of struggle

In this section Soweto is investigated as a site of struggle by briefly tracing how the Nationalist Party's fear of the black population resulted in the controlling of space through militarism. The notion of fear has been apparent in the way South Africans perceive townships. During the apartheid era the township of Soweto was regarded as a militarised and 'other' space due to white fears of the black majority (Soweto had to be controlled as it was a ticking time bomb) and the resistance struggle of black people against the apartheid regime.

Johannesburg – One Hundred Years (1986:xi) states that in 1985/6 more than a million black citizens lived in Soweto which is "as vibrant and flamboyant a twin city as any metropolis could ever hope to have. [It] represents the interface between first and third worlds". What does 'twin city' suggest? It suggests that there is some symbiosis between Soweto and Johannesburg. But this symbiosis is and never was a mutually beneficial relationship between the (black) residents/labourers of Soweto and the (white) employers/middle-class residents of Johannesburg. It furthermore suggests that Soweto is the 'other half' of the city, thus implying the 'othering' of black people. Figure 23 clearly shows the contradictory nature of Sowetan space. The modern FNB soccer stadium exists alongside the ruins of the Shareworld theme-park. The connotation between First and Third worlds also suggests that black people should be relegated to the ranks of second-rate citizens, which may mean that they have very little to offer the so-called (white) First world city of Johannesburg.

Figure 23: David Goldblatt, *The ruins of Shareworld and FNB Soccer City Stadium. Shareworld, intended as a theme-park to the people of Soweto, was built and went bankrupt in the late 1980s. 6 June 2009*, 2009b.
Digital print in pigment inks on 100% cotton rag paper, measurements not supplied.
(http://www.goodman-gallery.com/artists/davidgoldblatt).

Ashley Dawson (2004:19) elaborates on the issue of citizenship by stating that although township residents are formally included in "the social order as citizens, the vast majority ... remain squatters, extraneous to established notions of belonging on both a material and symbolic plane". The importance in examining spaces (Soweto) and people who exist on the margins of society (Sowetans) can be found in Edward Soja's (quoted in Schmid 1995:265) argument that "reconstituted critical human geography must be attuned to the emancipatory struggles of all those who are peripheralised and oppressed by the specific geography of capitalism ... exploited workers, tyrannised peoples, dominated women".

One also has to examine why certain citizens are excluded from society. Lewis Mumford (1974:60) formulates an answer to this question, and states that it is the city that "transmits a collective personality structure whose more extreme manifestations are now

recognised in individuals as pathological". Bremmer (2004a:455) states that this in turn structures the city as "paranoid, suspicious of difference, and hostile, combining the maximum amount of protection with the greatest incentives to aggression". The "threatening other" who embodies difference (whether a different class, race, ethnicity or language) is then "incarcerated, colonised or exterminated" (Bremmer 2004a:456).

Nuttall and Mbembe (2005:195) concur that in South Africa various people have been excluded and "cast away from traditional anchors of family, job and community and live a life of homelessness, squalor, and chronic disease". It is in this context of uprooted family structures, dispossession, sickness, and poverty that another social sore, namely the contentious issue of race, is festering. "Race directly gave rise to the space Johannesburg would become", contends Mbembe (2004:380), and therefore it is argued that Johannesburg is a racial city where people of colour had to actively fight an oppressive political system to gain a home in the city. The way Johannesburg was planned created and combined "a pastoral urban imaginary for white citizens with a militarisation space for blacks" (Mbembe 2004:385). An example that explicitly points to Soweto as a place of struggle is the student riots of 1976 and the Hector Pieterson memorial that was built to commemorate this event as part of the struggle for freedom.[36] Sifiso Ndlovu (1998:1) states that the Soweto uprisings of 16 June 1976 was a turning point in South Africa's black history which not only led to "ruthless repression and ineffective reforms" on the part of the Nationalist government, but also left black people with the "insurmountable problem of the 'lost generation'".[37] The new system of

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[36] It is of critical importance to investigate the motive for erecting memorials and museums in Soweto, as this township was branded as one of the most conflicted areas during apartheid. As Yeoh (2001:458) states: "urban forms and architecture, in particular, have been treated as a social and political means of representation in which a postcolonial nation forms a dialogue with its colonial past". When discussing Soweto as a militarised space wherein violent protests were held, Bremmer (2004a:458) states that during apartheid the township youth was seen as a "savage, demented, hysterical mob ... rejoicing in destruction, hands held aloft in defiance, hurling stones or homemade bombs, 'they' were young, defiant, angry, fearless, and violent". Furthermore, this particular portrayal of blackness "has roots deep in the imaginary of South Africa's colonial past" (Bremmer 2004a:458).

[37] Daniel Nina (1999:8) states that protagonist role children took on in the struggle against apartheid disrupted their lives, it curbed their "participation in normal age-related activities", it exposed children to "criminal or pseudo-criminal activities", and caused a "major dislocation of family life where a 'point of no return' took place in the life of many children, who were not able to return to their homes and became urban nomads or street children". All of these factors contributed to a generation who was not schooled and could not make a positive, intellectual contribution in the 'new' South Africa. The slogan, 'liberation

Afrikaans as medium of instruction was the core problem for blacks, who obtained poor marks in subjects that were taught in Afrikaans. Black schools, principals and learners in Soweto felt that the Department of Bantu Education was authoritarian in essence and provided no channels for communication to air grievances (Ndlovu 1998:7; Baines 2006:18). Issues such as limited resources and facilities at black schools contributed to the frustration and anger of black schools, but the use of Afrikaans became an "ideological issue which included the abuse of language and power" (Ndlovu 1998:14). The black learners who boycotted the new teaching system were questioning the status quo which led to learners staging a march in June to protest against the "oppressor's language" (Ndlovu 1998:35).

A remarkable phenomenon occurred in the aftermath of the uprisings: while the South African police force responded repressively and treated Soweto as a military battleground in order to 'protect' white interests in greater South Africa, the residents (including the youth) of Soweto also started to actively engage in a militarised fashion to protect their fellow residents against the police and other apartheid influences. As Monique Marks and Penny McKenzie (2005:1) point out: "they [were the] defenders of their communities". Many Sowetans participated in violent protests aimed at social, political and economic transformation as well as the "undermining and destroying [of] the apartheid state (Marks & McKenzie 2005:2). Violence was seen as an effective means of achieving change and the process of militarisation can be described as "a set of attitudes and social practices which regards war and the preparation for war as a normal and desirable social activity" (Marks & McKenzie 2005:7).

In the context of employing militarised activities to 'win' the apartheid state, the exiled ANC called on its followers to make the country ungovernable which resulted in violent

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before education', implied that "the very people who helped liberate South Africa would not have the education and skills to govern the country in the foreseeable future" (Baines 2006:20). Joan Wardrop (2009:114) also notes that this slogan was used during apartheid which led to producing "boys with dead eyes" because these young men had no education, no future and no hope.

opposition. [38] Townships were turned into battlegrounds and defence structures such as "barricades and foot patrols, as well as digging trenches to slow down or prohibit the movement of security force vehicles" were implemented (Marks & McKenzie 1995:11).[39] Police cars patrolled the townships night and day, but the cars were pelted by rocks and other missiles of angry township residents. [40] Daniel Nina (1999:6) adds that the Soweto uprising "marked the beginning of the open resistance era to apartheid". Police furthermore tried to clampdown on township residents by enforcing strict curfews and roadblocks which occurred daily, but little could be done to curb the 'total onslaught' of black township residents. As Ndlovu (1998:51) concurs before 1994 and the general elections, the state "as a dominant group used ... coercive means to maintain social control" but this control was not completely effective because it was opposed and "overcome by subordinate groups like the student movement".

It can thus be concluded that the space of Soweto was bounded by physical objects (barbed wire and fences) and ideological forces (military tactics and police presence). These tactics to control township space and its inhabitants were actively opposed through acts of defiance such as student demonstrations. The acts of resisting a dominant ideology formed Soweto into a space of struggle where its inhabitants fought for both a democratic society and an unbounded space to live in.

3.6 Conclusion

Johannesburg is a multi-facetted city with many layers of meaning. It is argued that the city can be studied as both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct. The authoritarian city's origin can be traced to the days of colonial rule which extended into

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[38] Chabedi (2003:361) also refers to the "campaign of ungovernability" which "contributed to the end of white rule". The struggle comrades wanted to make "apartheid unworkable" and "police brutality promoted an atmosphere of solidarity within the township" (Chabedi 2003:363).

[39] During the violent 1970s and 1980s the "borders of the Soweto townships – ironically to keep black people in – became barricades designed to keep white people out" (Chabedi 2003:364).

[40] According to Ellapen (2007:119) townships were subject to "high levels of surveillance and monitoring" and to make the township visible (and readily controllable) during the night, "tall steel township lights called Apollos were installed that transformed the darkness of the township at night into 'day-light'". The name 'Apollo' refers to the Greek god of sun and light, who was the son of Zeus. And therefore connotes male superiority as well as god-like power, all attributes related to Nationalist apartheid state.

the apartheid era. The legacy of both colonial and apartheid dominance is evident in the city's separatist spatial structure which at first excluded citizens based on race and thereafter based on socio-economic status. An example hereof is the northern suburbs that are reserved for wealthy white residents and the township areas that are reserved for both black and migrant workers.

Not only are townships regarded as the products of capitalist exclusionary practices and racial discriminatory ideologies, they are also the direct result of massive urbanisation. During the city's authoritarian period, early twentieth century urbanisation had a profound impact on the city due to the influx of black workers who came to Johannesburg is search of employment. The masses of migrant labourers or so-called *swart gevaar* (black danger) was used as part of the National Party's ideological agenda to win the 1948 election because the white population saw the black population as a treat. Colonial (racist mindsets), ideological warfare, and urbanisation, thus, contributed to the divided, fragmented city.

Township space should, however, not only be interpreted as separate, unwanted areas because these spaces can be analysed as both marginal and hybrid entities. It is argued that because space (the township) has a certain agency (a personhood) it can influence subjects (township inhabitants). Hybridity counteracts the passivity of being a marginal person or even a marginal space. It suggests that space is never stagnant or homogeneous, hence, it gives people the opportunity to counter oppressive practices such as spatial segregation and racism. Hybridity can, therefore, be regarded as one of the factors that led marginalised township inhabitants to transform their peripheral space into a place of struggle.

The next chapter deals with the urban underclass from which the train surfer emerges. The discussion of the urban underclass serves as background to frame train surfers as marginal, yet active subjects, who need to come to terms with their unique masculine identities while being faced with criminal elements, poverty and the HIV/AIDS pandemic inherent to township life. The distinctive spatial practice of train surfing and its

influencing factors are unpacked alongside a short overview of this phenomenon in Brazil. Existing literature and two television documentaries are also studied to gain insight into concepts such as fatalism and South Africa's lost generation.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE URBAN UNDERCLASS AND TRAIN SURFING SOWETO STYLE

4.1   Introduction

This chapter contextualises train surfers by exploring the specific class to which they belong, namely Johannesburg's underclass. Various theories, definitions and characteristics of the 'underclass' are interrogated to determine whether train surfers fit into this grouping. Some of these include poverty, exclusion and marginalisation.

Thereafter the social milieu and everyday circumstances in Soweto are discussed by focusing on four factors that the author deems may have an influence on train surfers. These factors are firstly, housing conditions and unemployment, secondly, failing family structures and absent fathers, thirdly, the legacy of gang culture, its link with a transitional society and the production of threatened masculinities, and lastly drug and alcohol abuse among adolescents. These factors are examined to come to some understanding of why train surfers engage in an extreme spatial practice. Where possible, first-person narratives of train surfers, as detailed in newspaper articles, television news reports, and documentaries are included to give a voice to this marginalised grouping.

After establishing the context wherein train surfing occurs, the origin of Soweto's lost generation is traced and the ways in which train surfers form part of a new lost generation is discussed. This section introduces train surfers' fatalistic outlook on life and how they perceive the suicidal practice of train surfing.

Lastly, train surfing as a phenomenon of the South is discussed by examining what comparative factors are present in Brazil and South Africa that contribute to the circumstances under which train surfing is practised.

4.2   Johannesburg's urban underclass

One way to analyse train surfers and their extreme practice is by exploring their socio-economical position within society. In this section the author draws on social anthropological theory, especially the concept of the underclass, to examine the social position of train surfers. It is argued that factors such as poverty, exclusion and marginalisation are inherent to the underclass and these factors influence the social behaviour of individuals.

According to Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant (1999:49), the economist Gunnar Myrdal coined the term 'underclass' in 1963, based on "the Swedish *onderklass*". Gunnar's intention was to "describe the process of marginalisation of the lower segments of the working classes in rich countries" in order to "criticise the ideology of the generalised embourgeoisement of capitalist societies". Gunnar's research thus highlights the process in which capitalist societies marginalise and exclude poorer classes. Two authors that have revived the debate in the late twentieth-century are Christopher Jencks and Paul Peterson. They explain the term 'underclass' as follows:

> .... 'class' is the least interesting half of the word. Although it implies a relationship between one social group and another, the terms of that relationship are left undefined until combined with the familiar word 'under' ... 'under' suggests the lowly, the passive, and submissive, yet at the same time the disreputable, dangerous, disruptive, dark, evil, and even hellish. And, apart from these personal attributes, it suggests subjection, subordination, and deprivation (Jencks & Peterson 1990:3).

The underclass thus implies a certain class or segment of society that is regarded as being inferior when compared to other classes such as the working class, the middle-class, and the upper-middle class. Whereas the working class and middle-class individuals contribute to the economy in terms of providing labour, the underclass are those members with limited or no participation in the labour force. They have to rely on government subsidies or on other means to survive. The underclass is also a social class that consists of people who are so underprivileged that they are excluded from mainstream society, because mainstream society regards them as a burden because they do not possess the means to contribute to the economy. When interpreting Jencks and Peterson's (1990:3)

statement it is apparent that the underclass is stigmatised through negative stereotypes such as being dangerous and disruptive towards the status quo.

To elaborate on this description, John Gulick (1989:196) states that one of the urban social class subcultures is called the underclass or "the culture of poverty". He describes the traits of the underclass as follows: "chronic unemployment, crowded living quarters ... strong present-time orientation, resignation and fatalism in the face of life's realities" (Gulick 1989:197).[1] Once again the belief that the underclass cannot contribute to the economy, because they are unemployed, is highlighted in Gulick's description. Without money or employment the underclass focuses only on the present and uses survival strategies to make ends meet. A fatalistic outlook, therefore, becomes prevalent in members of the underclass. However, Anthony Leeds (1971) and Charles Valentine (1968) warn that the poor is not to blame for their own condition.[2] The blame lies, Leeds and Valentine argue, in the larger society that deprives the underclass of power and resources and at the same time views the poor as being behaviourally defective or anti-social, and requiring reform (quoted in Gulick 1989:198). In Leeds and Valentine's argument a thinly veiled criticism of capitalism is present: capitalism oppresses the poor and they have no means to enter the labour market as they have no resources, little schooling and no money to further their education. Capitalism and dominant myths such as individual entrepreneurial success further subordinate this class. The processes of marginalisation and 'othering' further oppress the underclass when stereotypes such as 'the poor are anti-social' or simply 'deviant' are disseminated through affluent society.

Various and differing opinions exist about what defines the urban 'underclass'. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999:49) maintain that American researchers normally include "welfare recipients, and the long-term unemployed, unmarried mothers, single-parent families, rejects from the school system, criminals and gang members, drug addicts and the

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[1] Teresa Dirsuweit (2006:295) argues that the fragmented city creates spaces for the affluent (neighbourhoods) and spaces (slums, informal settlements and townships) that further contribute to a "marginalised urban underclass".

[2] Both authors conducted research regarding the urban underclass in the late 1960s. Leeds' findings are based on slum dwellers in Brazil and Peru and Valentine's findings are based on the social and economic exploitation of the poor in the United Sates of America.

homeless" under the term 'underclass'. This list of people (drug addicts, the homeless and single-parent families) are perceived as "living denials of the American dream of individual success" and are thus "excluded" from society because they deviate from the norm (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1999:49).

Locally, Loren Landau (2007:63) argues that the underclass in South Africa consists of people who are discriminated against due to their nationality or origin (immigrants and non-nationals) and are thus "socially, economically and politically excluded" from becoming active social agents. In the context of post-authoritarian Johannesburg discrimination and xenophobic attacks "based on nationality starkly contrasts with the government's commitments to tolerance and social inclusion" (Landau 2007:64).[3] The concept of marginalisation is also an inherent characteristic of the underclass because they are not incorporated within civil society, and are permanently dislocated from social and cultural activities in the city (Landau 2007:71).[4]

To further this point of marginality, Asef Bayat (2000:534) states that the urban underclass consists of "groups that are interchangeably referred to as 'urban marginals,' 'urban disenfranchised' and 'urban poor'". Bayat (2000:536) proclaims that urban marginality dates back to nineteenth century Europe and problems associated with urbanisation such as "urban crime, inner-city conditions, unemployment, migration, [and] cultural duality". The poor and other marginal figures were thus the scapegoats for all the social and political problems cities faced which, in turn, reinforced their marginal status rendering them powerless in the wake of such accusations. Bayat (2000:538) identifies four categories of the urban underclass namely "the passive poor, the surviving poor, the political poor and the resisting poor". The culture of poverty which envelops all four

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[3] In May 2008 violent xenophobic attacks occurred in Johannesburg's city centre and surrounding townships such as Tembisa (Xenophobic attacks spread 2008:[sp]).

[4] In this regard, the issue of citizenship is raised. Dirsuweit (2006:296) analyses citizenship and Lefebvre's "right to the city" and how inhabitants can become citizens if they live out certain routines of everyday life within the confines of a city. In this context, citizenship can be regarded as actively engaging in public life, contributing to the economy and functioning within city spaces. The city therefore has two types of inhabitants: the visible citizens who actively participate in social events (politics, economic and cultural activities etc.) and the invisible underclass that are often denied access to these activities and/or events.

categories, uncovers 'essential components' of this particular subaltern, namely "fatalism, rootlessness, unadaptability, traditionalism, criminality, lack of ambition [and] hopelessness" (Bayat 2000:538). Although these characteristics may be present in some sectors of the poor community, stereotypes and myths concerning these classes have indoctrinated broader society to such an extent that they insist that the underclass consists of hopeless cases who could never escape the cycle of poverty.

According to Bayat (2000:538), one has to remember that the myth of "marginality [is] an instrument of social control of the poor, and the marginalised poor as a product of capitalist social structure". This is, however, not a sign that the 'rural' or 'uncivilised' cannot adapt or make the shift to 'urban' or 'civilised'. As Bayat (2000:549) explains:

> This is so not because these people are essentially non- or anti-modern, but because the conditions of their existence compel them to seek an informal mode of life. For modernity is a costly affair; not everyone can afford to be modern. Since it requires the capacity to conform to the types of behaviour and mode of life (adherence to strict disciplines of time, space, contracts and so on) which most vulnerable people simply cannot afford.

The money-economy of capitalist societies thus contributes to the formation of townships, slums and informal settlements as the urban underclass cannot enter middle-class suburbs and own homes, because they cannot afford a middle-class lifestyle. One cannot, therefore, analyse townships or informal settlements as products of a rural, uncivilised people, but one could rather interpret it as the failure of modern and capitalist societies.

To narrow the focus on Johannesburg's underclass, Susan Parnell (2005:38) states that the location of South Africa's urban underclass has shifted from rural areas to urban sites: "households in absolute poverty are geographically concentrated in townships, informal settlements and marginalised displaced urban settlements, though there are many cases anywhere in the city". It is evident through observing Johannesburg's decaying city centre and the surrounding townships that this city has a large underclass, as South Africa

is severely burdened by poverty and unemployment.[5] Not only do South Africans struggle to survive financially, Ingrid Woolard (2002:1) explains that "life expectancy has fallen from 62 years in 1990 to 48 years in 1999 as a consequence of AIDS". Classification of the underclass is furthermore dependent on housing conditions and employment status. Johannesburg's underclass inhabits two distinct areas, namely townships (informal houses and shacks without basic sanitation or access to electricity) and the city centre (derelict buildings). Many of the inhabitants in townships and the city centre are unemployed or employed for only short periods in the informal sector.

From the above discussion of the definition and inherent characteristics of the underclass, one can identify various figures that belong to this grouping. It can be deduced that poor and unemployed urbanites that either inhabit townships or the city centre can be regarded as being part of the urban underclass. Another figure that forms part of the urban underclass is the marginalised AIDS sufferer. Frédéric Le Marcis (2004:453) notes the irony within the South African society, by stating, "people obtained their freedom and fell sick at the same time". The notion that sick people are shifted to the fringes of society is explored by Michael Watts (2005:187) who states that the sick occupy a sphere outside the normal life world of citizens, rendering them invisible. Furthermore, Watts (2005:187) argues that there is a parallel between "the figure of the pauper in nineteenth century England and the figure of the AIDS victim in Johannesburg". AIDS victims are also impoverished as they often become too weak to work and high absenteeism is prevalent amongst AIDS sufferers. Furthermore the AIDS victim relies on aid from public funds to survive.[6]

The third marginal figure that forms part of the underclass is the non-national or immigrant residing in Johannesburg. Landau (2006:126) states that immigrants are considered alien and these 'aliens' face "severe and immediate consequences including trauma, poverty and violence – yet their reaction, or the ways in which these influence

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[5] According to Woolard (2002:1), of the 44 million people living in South Africa approximately 8 million live on less than one dollar per day and a staggering 18 million South Africans have to survive on two dollars per day.
[6] See Bourdieu and Wacquant (1999:49) who state that the underclass also comprises of welfare recipients.

conceptions of space and collective belonging, have rarely been examined". In the South African context, immigrants are regarded as rootless non-South Africans who are the scapegoats for crime, the spreading of disease, unemployment, as well as "eroding moral values needed to build a new South Africa" (Landau 2006:127). Immigrants are seen as the archetypal 'other' and are linked to South Africa's "social pathologies", which include HIV/AIDS and illegal activities such as drug dealing and participation in fraud schemes (Landau 2006:131).[7]

The fourth member of the urban underclass that the author has identified is the train surfer. The author argues that train surfers have difficulty to construct a positive identity because of various factors that include: being exposed to demographic upheaval in the form of displacement and the hardships of living in a township or squatter camp; the effects of emerging from a very specific class and social status; and the effects of being brought up in the context of post-authoritarian Johannesburg. Train surfers are poor and treated as 'deviant' because they participate in illegal activities (such as train surfing and in some cases train surfers steal purses from commuters) and this paves the way for their further exclusion and marginalisation. As such, train surfers fulfill all three 'prerequisites' of the underclass: they are poor and for this reason, are excluded and marginalised. Their socio-economic position can also be regarded as a factor that influences their behaviour. This assertion is discussed in Section 4.5 where train surfing as a fatalistic practice is examined.

In conclusion, when the various theories regarding the underclass are explored and applied to the urbanites of Johannesburg, it can be deduced that Johannesburg has an urban underclass and this segment consists of various figures: the poor who cannot contribute to the economy because they are unemployed; the diseased who cannot stay employed and due to their illness have to rely on government grants for survival; the powerless and voiceless immigrants who are the scapegoats for many of society's

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[7] Ntunja Ngwenya, a Swazi, and Tumi Mphahlele, a South African, explain the following derogatory terms used when referring to foreigners: *grigamba* (strange, foreign, a gorilla); *makwerekwere* (cracked heels, unhygienic); *Dubai* (referring to Indians or counterfeit goods); *Mugabes* (Zimbabweans); *mablantane* (strange or other, and this term is often used to refer to Mozambicans) (Ngwenya & Mphahlele 2010).

problems; and the train surfer who is also poor and engages in the illegal activity of train surfing. All of these figures endure negative stereotypes and stigmatisation and are therefore marginalised.

Classifying train surfers as part of the urban underclass merely serves as one way of defining these individuals. Contributing factors such as the spatial, social and economic circumstances that contextualise and make train surfing possible must be explored to gain more insight into the socio-economic realm of train surfers. The next section not only serves as a continuation of the factors inherent to Johannesburg's underclass, namely poor housing conditions and high levels of unemployment, but also strives to substantiate the argument that these distinct circumstances have an influence on train surfers and their extreme, high-risk practice.

4.3   Train surfing in Soweto: social milieu and circumstances

The author has identified the following factors that may have an influence on young train surfers in Soweto: firstly housing conditions and unemployment, secondly family structures and absent fathers, thirdly the legacy of gang culture, particularly how it links with a transitional society and the production of threatened masculinities, and lastly the availability and abuse of drugs and alcohol. These factors illustrate the social milieu and everyday circumstances in townships like Soweto, and are corroborated in research conducted by Jill Swart-Kruger and Louise Chawla (2002), Marks Chabedi (2003), Achille Mbembe, Nsizwa Dlamini and Grace Khunou (2004), Magaret Westaway (2006), Anni Hesselink (2008), Linda Richter, Saadhna Panday, Tanya Swart and Shane Norris (2009), as well as Carren Ginsberg, Shane Norris, Linda Richter and David Coplan (2009).

4.3.1   Township space: housing conditions and unemployment

Various political, social and economic elements have shaped the township of Soweto into a highly complex spatial construct. These elements include: violent apartheid policies

such as forced removals implemented by the National Party, urbanisation and migration patterns that led to squatting and a lack of housing, the prevalence of unemployment and poverty as well as a new political rhetoric emphasising the idea of hope for a better future.

Due to the above fusion of elements, Mbembe et. al. (2004:499-500) read township spaces as being a "highly syncretic urban formation" that is "beyond the spatialities and temporalities of apartheid", and also as "a space in motion". Soweto emerged through "forced removals, squatting and state violence" and is still characterised by severe poverty, writes Chabedi (2003:357). But the advent of democracy has brought changes in the economic and spatial structures of the township. Barbara Piazza-Georgi (2002:615-616) describes Soweto as racially "homogeneous ... but quite diverse in most other respects (income levels, social origins, ethnic groups and education)". As such, Soweto is an example of hybrid space.[8] Its spatial and demographic structures testify to its apartheid legacy, as well as newfound prosperity and the emergence of upward class mobility. Soweto has established neighbourhoods, community centres and shopping malls, but it also has squatter camps that house the "more deprived and are home almost exclusively to the unemployed" (Mbembe et. al. 2004:500).

The author argues that the material and social living conditions of young adolescents contribute to the way in which they perceive the world; how they navigate the space in which they live and the choices they make regarding risk-taking behaviour. To attain a clear picture of these conditions in Soweto, the author turns to research conducted by Richter et. al. (2009). Data obtained from Richter et. al. show that due to rapid urbanisation and migration patterns, Johannesburg's poor is located in "un-serviced slum areas", like Soweto, where a quarter of people do not have access to basic services such as "adequate housing, water and sanitation" (Richter et. al. 2009:330-331).[9]

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[8] Chapter Three, Section 3.5 gives a full description of the hybrid nature of Soweto.
[9] See also Westaway (2006:3) whose research concurs with that of Richter et. al. (2009).

To illustrate the specific housing conditions the examination of the daily living conditions in different neighbourhoods of Johannesburg may be useful. Swart-Kruger and Chawla (2002:93) state that Pimville, which is part of Soweto, has a population that is ninety-nine per cent black and one-third of its residents is under the age of 20. The following key-features of this area are identified by Swart-Kruger and Chawla (2002:93) and they stress that most of these features are typical to other parts of Soweto as well:

- most houses consist of four rooms that are shared by six people, and these houses have backyard rooms made of corrugated iron;
- most houses have small gardens, but no designated play spaces for children;
- children fear people who gather in the open *veld* (bush); and
- there are waste dumps in the vicinity of Pimville where people scavenge for food.[10]

These findings corroborate the assertion that some Sowetans are part of the urban underclass as they live in housing structures that are not as luxurious and comfortable as the houses occupied by other social classes such as the middle class and upper middle class.

Another factor that influences both living conditions and access to housing is employment. The unemployment rate in Soweto was fifty-four per cent in 1999, fifty-three per cent in 2001 and fifty-seven per cent in 2002 (Westaway 2006:10). Data collected from Census 2001, the General Household Survey 2004, and Labour Force Survey 2001 indicate that the national rate of unemployment was thirty per cent. In Gauteng, Johannesburg has the highest number of unemployed residents, namely thirty-

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[10] To generalise these findings in terms of housing conditions, Alan Gilbert and Owen Crankshaw (1999:2379) state that in 1997 Soweto had approximately 1,2 million residents of which forty-four per cent lived in backyard shacks, thirty-four per cent in council houses, seven per cent in hostels, six per cent in private houses, and five per cent in informal settlements or squatter camps. To draw a clear distinction between informal and formal housing, Statistics South Africa (2006:73) defines formal housing as "a house on a separate stand, an apartment in a block of flats, a townhouse/cluster/semi-detached house". No recent literature was found regarding the present housing conditions in Soweto, but the most recent provincial report, published by Statistics South Africa (2006:73), indicate that in Gauteng, sixty-five per cent of black African-headed households live in formal dwellings and twenty-six per cent live in informal dwellings. This report also states that the fifty-eight per cent of households headed by black Africans live in dwellings consisting of fewer than four rooms where the size of a dwelling is calculated by counting the number of rooms, including kitchens but excluding toilets and bathrooms (Statistics South Africa 2006:74). Data from Statistics South Africa clearly indicate that there has been a gradual improvement in terms of the percentage of black Africans who live in formal housing structures in 2004 when compared to the statistics quoted by Gilbert and Crankshaw in 1999.

eight per cent (Statistics South Africa 2006:70). These findings clearly highlight that Soweto has a very high unemployment rate when compared to the national average. The following conclusions can be drawn from the statistics regarding housing conditions and the rate of unemployment. It can be deduced that many young adolescents who live in townships like Soweto, live in small four-room houses. Even if they are not squatter inhabitants themselves, they are exposed to squatter camps and are in contact with people who are severely deprived. Access to shopping malls, recreational facilities and sport complexes are also limited. Westaway (2006:13) states that young people in Soweto are dissatisfied with the lack of recreational facilities in their neighbourhood. This is problematic as "recreational facilities can be major deterrents to the high crime rates experienced in South Africa, as these are perceived as one of the most effective means of empowering youth and keeping young people out of crime" (Westaway 2006:13). This statement is applicable in the case of train surfers who perhaps do not have access to recreational facilities and therefore utilise train stations and railway tracks as leisure/recreational spaces.

Lastly, financial constraints also usher young adolescents into dangerous and/or criminal activities. In 1994 the ANC promised 'a better life for all' and instilled hope for the alleviation of poverty in many township dwellers. And although there is an emerging black middle class and social mobility is visible "the expected benefits of democracy failed to materialise for the majority of the population" (Chabedi 2003:366). If the unemployment rate statistics are generalised, in 2004 approximately four in ten Sowetans were believed to be unemployed. This shows that even though housing conditions have marginally improved, many young Sowetans will face obstacles in their search for employment and adequate housing. Another consequence of unemployment is the availability of leisure time. Unemployed people or school children who have bleak future outlooks and believe that they will never find employment have ample free time to participate in dangerous activities such as train surfing. Without positive future prospects there is, therefore, nothing to deter adolescents from engaging in dangerous activities.

The next section focuses on a second factor that influences the youth of Soweto, namely the legacy of migrant labour practices and the phenomenon of absent fathers.

4.3.2   Failing family structures and absent fathers

At least three factors contributed to the fragmentation of African family structures from the late nineteenth century until the early twenty-first century. These are migrant labour practices in the mining sector, the establishment of traditional homelands and policies of influx control. Richter et. al. (2009:321) state that African households were severely "disrupted due to high labour mobility resulting in conjugal disruption, illegitimacy, desertion and fragmentation of the traditional extended African family unit". Although traditional homelands were disbanded and no influx control acts are currently in place, many black people still grow up in fragmented families. A survey of households in Soweto conducted in 1997 revealed that "many families of migrant origin were currently more permanently established in Soweto, with [forty-one per cent] of household heads born in the metropolitan area" (Ginsberg et. al. 2009:409).

More recent figures point out that in 2007 a fifth of black fathers lived away from their families and half of black children did not live with their parents (Richter et. al. 2009:321). In this context, care of children is undertaken by "relatives and neighbouring non-relatives" and this kind of fosterage is a "traditional means of support" within black cultures (Richter et. al. 2009:329). Within the fosterage framework grandparents also fulfil an important care-giving role and "take on financial responsibility for children in the absence of their parents" (Richter et. al. 2009:330). Although fosterage might be a traditional means of establishing a family or care-giving environment, it has to be noted that fathers play an "important role ... in child and adolescent development" and "father absence may also have negative implications for young people's financial support" (Richter et. al. 2009:329).

To gather supporting evidence that young adolescents in townships are in fact influenced by broken or fragmented family structures, the only academic account of train surfing in

South Africa is very insightful regarding the views of train surfers, their reasons for train surfing as well as factors that influence their daily lives. Hesselink (2008:120) conducted interviews with male train surfers in Soweto and her findings regarding their family background are as follows: eighty-nine per cent of train surfers "lived with extended families (i.e. representative of one biological parent, a grandmother/grandfather, aunt/uncle and/or siblings)". Forty-four per cent of the interviewees indicated that their fathers are absent, a third of the respondents indicated that both their mother and father are absent, and twenty-two per cent of the train surfers said that their biological mother is not present in their household. This clearly illustrates that ninety-eight per cent of train surfers in Soweto emerge from broken families whereas only two per cent come from nuclear families. These finding also upheld the facts presented in the *Special Assignment* (2006) documentary, which stated that train surfers had lost their fathers at a young age and had been raised by their mothers.[11] Helen Grange (2007:11), a South African journalist, concurs with the above and states that train surfers tend to "be from either single-parent families, or they are the head of an orphaned family themselves". These findings are also supported in broader statistics. In a survey conducted by Piazza-Georgi (2002:617) forty-four per cent of the surveyed households in Soweto were non-nuclear. Piazza-Georgi (2002:618) explains that the household structure in Soweto paints a picture of "a society in transition, i.e. it is no longer a traditional society with a preponderance of large extended family groups".

But the everyday lives of train surfers are not only disrupted due to a broken family, they are also subjected to other abuses within their specific family structure. Hesselink (2008:122) describes how train surfers are victimised: forty-four per cent of the respondents indicated that they were subjected to severe physical abuse at home, such as kicking, punching and beatings; twenty-two per cent of the respondents stated that they were victims of emotional abuse and neglect, and eleven per cent said that they were belittled at school by their peers. In a newspaper article, Kathy Whitehead (2008:33) also

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[11] Lefa Mzimela's father left home when he was too young to remember and never paid child support (*Special Assignment* 2006).

states that there are "usually social problems in the homes of train surfers [and these children] are also often seen as out of control by their schools".

To conclude, Brenda Robertson (1994:41) who studied delinquent behaviour in America, states that young adolescents live constrained lives due to "changes in the family". Under normal circumstances young men, in Robertson's study, shared activities with their fathers that "were meaningful [and] once the fathers left, they had no one with whom to share these experiences" (Robertson 1994:41). It can be deduced that because most train surfers grow up in broken homes, are exposed to emotional and/or physical abuse, and have no father-figure to share experiences with, it is easy for them to be lured into train surfing that offers kinship and solidarity. The author therefore argues that the breakdown of social controls such as parental bonds, societal norms and values may lead to delinquency and risk-taking behaviour. Associated with concepts such as kinship, solidarity and acceptance is Soweto's gang culture that has been formed by transitions in society and which, in return, produce threatened identities/masculinities.

4.3.3   Gangs and threatened masculinities in a transitional society

To establish a clearer link between the political and transitional aspects that lead to gang formation the author draws on Clive Glaser's encompassing account of township gangs. The origins of Soweto's gang culture, as explored by Glaser is summarised as follows: gang formation in townships is part of a "young male peer group phenomenon;" and gangs also emerge when "play networks [and] personal and territorial familiarity [between] teenage boys" gradually change (Glaser 1998a:308). The reason for this change is the emergence of "masculine competitiveness" within the "congested neighbourhoods of Soweto".[12]

Gang culture within townships like Soweto is also closely associated with the control of space. Township gangs control their territory vehemently and because of their powerful

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[12] Glaser (1998b:736) states that gang culture usually emerges in "deprived and socially blocked, working class communities".

image, they become 'role models' that are widely admired by teenage males. The following are, according to Glaser (1998b:725-727), characteristic of gangs in Soweto. Firstly, rival gangs are in constant competition over material resources and women. The more material resources they acquire, the more prestige they have among peers. This is thus done to establish a name for themselves and to become famous. Secondly, the use of alcohol and/or drugs is common among gang members. A third aspect, the victimisation of so-called outsiders, is prevalent because gang members want to instil 'respect' in non-members and the community. Here, emphasis is also placed on physical courage. A fourth aspect is the choice of a gang name. Gang names normally express their members' "masculine assertiveness" and try to "evoke ferocity". Lastly, depending on the circumstances, gangs may be "more or less criminal".

The author has divided Soweto's gang culture into three distinct phases based on the particular type of gang activity that was most prevalent during each phase. The first phase, which occurred during the 1970s, was characterised by high levels of crime within the township. Glaser (1998a:308) states that in the early 1970s there were over fifty youth gangs in Soweto, membership ranged from fifteen to thirty members per gang, and of these gangs the Hazels of Mzimhlophe and the Dirty Dozen were the most infamous.

The second phase took place a decade later, in the 1980s. Political turmoil and the emergence of the black political activism bred pride in many township inhabitants and comrades actively disciplined criminals and combatted crime. This gave rise to the term *tsotsi*[13] to describe self-proclaimed criminals and thieves who did not participate in political activities and chose to steal for a living (Chabedi 2003:361). During this phase gangs and gang activities were eclipsed by student activists and their protests. Where young adolescents during the 1970s were exposed to violent gangs, in the 1980s "young activists emerged as powerful new role models" (Glaser 1998a:310).

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[13] Glaser (1998b:727) states that the word *tsotsi* is derived from the South Sotho *ho tsotsa*, which means 'to sharpen'. The word first referred to very tight-fitting "stovepipe trousers which were the central style item of the youth subculture [black youth culture in the 1950s]". Today the word *tsotsi* refers to either a criminal or a gangster.

The third phase, labelled the transitional period or post-apartheid era, saw a reversal of the political activities that kept criminal interests at bay thus leading to an increase in crime and gang activity. Gangs and gang formation normally exploit the political climate of societies. This is also true in the South African context. The struggle and resistance tactics employed by township residents during the 1970s and 1980s created an environment that was conductive to lawlessness and served as a prelude to South Africa's democratic era. Coupled with the previous decades' ungovernability, was the advent of democracy that produced a transitional country. Here, the transitional state of affairs led to "a general rise in crime and insecurity" (Chabedi 2003:357).[14] Mark Shaw (2002:1) defines a transitional society as one that moves from "authoritarian rule to democracy ... or from military to civilian rule". Transitional societies are also optimistic about the future, but the "weakening and changing forms of social control are ... conductive to criminality" (Shaw 2002:2). Shaw (2002:6) also notes if a "high level of violence has been a dominant feature of the society in the pre-transitional period", this violence will normally continue after the transition.

Shaw (2002:8) explains the link between a transitional society and the insurgence of crime as follows: the "disruptive nature of transitions and the violence that often accompanies them weaken[s] old forms of social organisation" such as the "church, community groups, the extended family and neighbourhood groups", and the breakdown of these social controls creates situations and environments that are more "conductive to crime".[15]

Although South Africa's transitional period was not marked by extreme examples of violence, many promises of a better future for all have not realised for many disadvantaged black people. This is another element that sways adolescents into illegal activities. As Shaw (2002:9) explains:

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[14] After the fall of apartheid South Africans envisioned a united 'rainbow nation' (to use Archbishop Desmond Tutu's words), but according to Albert Fu and Martin Murray (2007:280), "this watershed transition to parliamentary democracy has gone hand-in-hand with rising crime (whether real or imagined) and the fear of the 'dangerous city' that it has engendered".

[15] "Everyday life in Soweto now takes place against a backdrop of escalating criminal violence ... The traditional forms of solidarity and networks of trust prominent during the 1980s, have steadily fallen" (Chabedi 2003:366).

if, over time, poverty and marginalisation are perceived as a likely reality, the recourse to illicit ... [activities] is often (particularly for the young) perceived as the most efficient and low risk avenue to live better *now* rather than wait for the uncertain prospects for improvement promised by the state [emphasis in original].[16]

It can be argued that the construction of fragmented, threatened masculinities and the emergence of new criminal and train surfing gangs are the consequences brought about by the breakdown of societal norms within a transitional society and the failures of South Africa's democracy. Joan Wardrop (2009:114) examines the construction of masculinities in a township environment. Her research is useful in furthering the argument that train surfers construct their identity in relation to their traumatic and disempowered everyday lives. According to Wardrop (2009:115), the bodies of (black) South African men

archive a colonial history of domination, regulation and violence, overwhelmingly masculinist in character: a collective history riven by repeated acts of inhumanity, by formalised, large scale acts of creation of the Other, and by the non-consensual imposition of a structurally violent system through persistent terrorisation and intimidation.

These factors contribute to the construction of a 'threatened masculinity', that Wardrop (2009:122-123) defines as the manifestation of "mourning a lost, more certain past, longing for purpose, for some utopian past in which 'tradition' and 'culture' held clearly defined meanings" thus creating "a loss of authenticity, negative self-evaluation and alienation, self-hatred, shame at 'being black', despair and rage".[17]

One way in which young township adolescents construct their identities is by joining a gang. To elaborate on this issue, Glaser (1998b:721-722) states that gangs are "expressions of young urban masculinity" and offer "companionship and social

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[16] Wardrop (2009:116) states that children who are born in post-apartheid South Africa are called "born frees" as they are not burned by apartheid's vicious political, social and economic constraints. Wardrop (2009:116), however, notes that "South Africans, in townships, in suburbs, continue to live with fear and vulnerability, with an apartheid inheritance of a culture of violence".

[17] For Mbembe (2003:39) "to live under late modern occupation, is to experience a permanent condition of being in pain". Wardrop (2009:122) also states that "dislocated, disempowered and dysfunctional masculinities" are a result of the impacts of "underemployment, of lack of status and adequate income even when in work, of the family dislocations resulting from labour migration and of the loss of a sense of the masculine self as family provider and patriarch".

acceptance". Many African societies place great value on issues such as masculinity and certain rites must be performed before a boy reaches social status as a man. African societies are furthermore "age graded ... into three distinct phases [and] the youth [is] slotted into a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood" (Glaser 1998b:722). For young boys to enter adulthood they must be initiated by their elders.[18] Glaser (1998b:722) describes this initiation period as being synonymous with "rebellion, mobility, fighting, assertion of independence and sexual experimentation". In an urban context, where rural traditions might not be strongly upheld and initiation schools are not easily accessible, the induction into a youth gang seems to be the most likely route to adulthood.[19] This argument is substantiated in the next section that deals with the current gang or train surfing gang membership among train surfers.

4.3.4   Current Sowetan train surfing gangs

In Soweto there are four train surfing gangs, namely the Cheese Boys, Zero Tolerance, The Vandals, and Izinyoka-Nyoka (Dlamini 2006:1; Hesselink 2008:125).[20] Grange (2007:11) states that train surfers are "all male and typically aged between 15 and 23, so the need to impress girls and peer pressure to do an act of bravery are major factors". The aims of these gangs, according to the train surfers interviewed by Hesselink (2008:125), are to "compete against each other", to see who the best train surfer is, and to "honour other train surfers when there is a funeral". Forty-four per cent of the train surfers interviewed by Hesselink were involved in a train surfing gang. One of the train surfers interviewed was also involved in a community gang. This (anonymous) train surfer indicated that he joined this gang that committed robberies for financial gain because

> they accept me for who I am, I belong there, they like me, we share the same
> things, to get away from problems at home, to be one of the boys, to get access to
> money and to use drugs together (quoted in Hesselink 2008:122).

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[18] Some examples hereof include initiation rites practiced by Xhosa, Zulu, Pedi and Venda cultures.
[19] For Glaser (1998b:723) one other aspect that influences young boys to join a gang is the "absence of older generation kinship supervision" in townships and large cities such as Johannesburg.
[20] According to a train surfer, Tshepiso Ntohla, the "cheese boys surf for fun while the *mvonqas* surf to get away from the guards after stealing [hand] bags or cell phones from commuters" (Dlamini 2006:[sp]).

Another train surfer, Prince Shiba (who is also featured in the *Special Assignment* documentary), confessed to Sheree Russouw (2007:7), that he was part of a train surfing gang and they would "snatch phones, jewellery and bags" from commuters by climbing through windows from the top of the train and then would jump off. He and his fellow train surfing gang members would then sell the stolen items to obtain money for alcohol and drugs (Russouw 2007:7). From these narratives it is apparent that young train surfers join gangs to be accepted by their peers. Gangs offer a 'safe-haven' for adolescents who struggle to cope with societal pressures, such as rejection at home, because once they are initiated into a gang they are accepted unconditionally by other members.

Another aspect that makes gang life alluring is the fact that gang members perceive themselves as being 'manly' and superior to non-gang members. An example of this superiority complex is reflected in the way train surfers describe ex-train surfers (i.e. those who are no longer part of a train surfing gang or those who have stopped train surfing altogether): "they are scared of dying"; "they are stupid and scared"; and "they are cowards" (Hesselink 2008:126). Another example of a fearless persona is explicitly relayed in the account of an anonymous gangster: "I would try to go to my death smiling. This is what we mean by being 'macho' – by being manly" (Glaser 1998b:726).

A contributing factor in the construction of a masculine identity among train surfers is the adoring crowd. The onlookers who cheer train surfers on usually consist of "females; girlfriends from the townships; friends who are too scared to do it [train surfing]; commuters on the train; girls who love dangerous boys [and] our 'virgin'-friends'", that is, those who have never train surfed (Hesselink 2008:127). When asked what the onlookers mean to the young train surfers, they replied: "bayizi-khokho – we are the kings to them; they cheer at us, promoting and acknowledging our talents; that we are masters at what we are doing ... it is also entertaining for them since they are bored, so, we entertain them" (Hesselink 2008:127). Russouw (2007:7) imparts the account of Nhlanhla Nhlapo, a 19-year old train surfer from Soweto. Nhlapo says that "this [train surfing] is something to be famous. You can get a lot of girls. They hang out the windows and scream at you while you are on top of the train". Connotations attached to words

such as "kings" and "masters" again substantiate the argument that train surfers long for recognition, a superior feeling and status. These words also emphasise a certain gender, male, and therefore enhance the idea that train surfers perceive themselves as alpha males.

To further the argument that train surfing gangs offer young adolescents an opportunity to construct a new persona, the author proposes that train surfers construct hybrid or multi-facetted identities. The train surfer has a myriad of identities or personas that he can choose to transform himself into. He is a young man, a train surfer, a member of a train surfing gang, a school pupil, a son, and perhaps a brother to siblings. Train surfers also adopt nicknames by which they are known. Albert Fu and Martin Murray (2007:182) provides proof of this multiplicity by stating: "[the] new generation of young black urban South Africans ... has adopted a hybrid style that reflects the inosculation of both African and American popular cultures". Evidence of this is found in the way train surfers choose their nicknames and the terms given to their stunts. Their nicknames and stunts normally refer to American popular culture: rap artists and their song titles, hip-hop culture, American wrestlers as well as American movies. This phenomenon of imitating a different culture can, according to Fu and Murray (2007:182), "be read as appropriation by fellow disenfranchised urban youth, who share similar experiences of living on the margin with few opportunities for upward social mobility into the mainstream of city life".

Examples of the adoption of American cultural terms and references to popular culture are documented in television documentaries and South African newspaper articles. In *Special Assignment*'s (2006) documentary called *Soweto Surfing* one surfer, Prince Shiba, calls himself "Bitch Nigga". This nickname is mentioned in songs by American rappers Tupac and 50 Cent. Shiba differentiates himself from other surfers by dressing in black clothes. The reason for his distinct attire is that black clothes remind him of the movie *The Matrix* (*Special Assignment* 2006). Shiba is also reputed to be the "first to crawl underneath a moving train and appear, unscathed, on the other side (Russouw 2007:7). Russouw (2007:7) states that Shiba invented this stunt for "fame" and because of this

dare-devil stunt, he regards himself a "master" and a "legend". Lefa Mzimela, another train surfer, imitated Shiba's stunts and started to train surf backwards, "which meant calculating the distance between the cable poles and bridges" (Grange 2007:11). This style was dubbed "Viva la Raza" referring to the Mexican-American wrestler, Eddie Geurrero's wrestling style (Grange 2007:11; Dlamini 2006:[sp]).

The *Carte Blanche* (2008), *Sky News* (2006) documentaries and Ndaba Dlamini's newspaper article (2006) also include references to identity construction. Tshepiso Ntohla, is known as Mzembe (trousers in Zulu) and compares himself to American wrestlers (Dlamini 2006:[sp]). The reference to American wrestlers can be interpreted as linking the impoverished train surfer to an overt overly-masculine construct that supposedly exudes power, status, confidence, potency and virility. Other train surfers call themselves Godfather, Bin Laden, Mrider, Abomrider and Sisqo and experienced train surfers are called 'big dogs'. All of these names clearly suggest that train surfers want to take on different identities, whether the newly formed identity has associations to fame, power or to terrorist acts and suicide.

Another physical attribute that points to the construction of a perceived masculine identity is Ntohla's scar that runs from his right eye to the centre of his forehead. He sustained serious injuries in a train surfing accident, but according to Dlamini (2006:[sp]) he wears the scar with "pride". Ntohla is thus proud that he survived the accident and still views train surfing as a "noble" activity (Dlamini 2006:[sp]).

From the above it is clear that train surfers want to enhance their identity by adopting nicknames that evoke a sense of virility and manliness. This is in line with the argument that if masculine identities are threatened, young adolescents reinforce their identities by joining gangs and participating in risk-taking activities such as train surfing.

Another factor present in the social milieu of train surfers is the abuse of alcohol and drugs. The next section deals with drugs and alcohol abuse as a way to compensate for low self-esteem, self doubt and other insecurities.

4.3.5   Drugs and alcohol

Drug and alcohol use/abuse is the last factor that has an influence on train surfers. All the train surfers interviewed by Hesselink (2008) indicated that they abused alcohol. The following is a summarised account of the interviewees' description regarding the effects that alcohol has on their behaviour as well as the reasons for alcohol consumption: alcohol makes them feel good about themselves and it takes away the pain of a father's or mother's rejection. Drinking is regarded as a 'cool' thing to do and it gives them "spirit [courage] to face [their] fears" that is, to cope with everyday situations (Hesselink 2008:120). Alcohol also helps them forget about their problems at home and alcohol gives them self-confidence (Hesselink 2008:120-121). One respondent also indicated that he followed the example of his parents who abuse alcohol. These findings are in line with the *Sky News* (2006), *Special Assignment* (2006) and *Carte Blanche* (2008) documentaries wherein train surfers tell of their alcohol abuse to give them courage to surf trains.

Forty-four per cent of the train surfers interviewed by Hesselink (2008) indicated that they abused drugs. Twenty-two per cent said they used *dagga* (cannabis) and the other twenty-two per cent said they used a cannabis and cocaine mixture. When asked what effects drugs have on their behaviour, the train surfers replied: "high and I don't fear anything"; "high so I can touch the sky"; it makes "me to be high and approach girls easy"; and "great and man enough to do anything, girls like me" (Hesselink 2008:121). The reasons given for their drug abuse are the same reasons given for their alcohol abuse.

From the above-mentioned findings it is clear that young men cannot train surf without either drugs or alcohol. The main reasons for substance abuse are the following: it gives surfers courage, because "getting out of a train when it is moving is scary"; it prevents surfers from getting "cold feet"; drugs and/or alcohol gives them courage, confidence and boosts their "self-esteem"; and it makes them "brave" (Hesselink 2008:123).

These narratives can be interpreted as desperate attempts to supplement their existing identity to construct a new, 'braver' version of themselves. The author reads these accounts as follows: the subject feels that he lacks something, namely courage and without alcohol or drugs he is not man enough to face such a dangerous activity. The subject furthermore feels like a coward and to overcome this impotence, he uses drugs and alcohol to feel brave. He train surfs for a specific reason or goal which is to attain girls' admiration. Train surfing, is thus, an activity that proves his masculinity and the subject feels that he cannot be a 'complete' man if he does not train surf.

The youth of Soweto are exposed to various elements and circumstances that have an impact on the way they perceive the world. Access to adequate housing and basic services is hampered by high unemployment rates. Many adolescents grow up in dysfunctional families, are exposed to gangs and other criminal activities, and drug and alcohol abuse is prevalent in townships. These elements shape adolescents into individuals who are fatalistic about the future and find it easy to participate in high-risk activities. Unemployment, illegal and/or dangerous activities and drug/alcohol abuse threaten the agency of individuals as these factors effectively render people incapable of full participation in cultural, societal and political aspects of life. The next section therefore considers the origin of Soweto's lost generation and how train surfers are becoming part of the present day lost generation.

4.4   Soweto's lost generation

Soweto's lost generation can be interpreted as a social phenomenon rather than a political construct. The following is a summary of the origin of Soweto's lost generation.[21]

The first signs of a lost generation became apparent in the 1970s and 1980s. Jeremy Seekings (1996:103) states that the political turmoil of the late 1970s and 1980s, "broken

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[21] It can be argued that South Africa, as a whole, generated a lost generation that encompasses different races and ages. One can also argue that white South Africans form part of the larger category (a South African lost generation) as many white South Africans were also exposed to political turmoil during the apartheid years and the Border War. This dissertation, however, only explores a subcategory namely Soweto's lost generation that consists of young, black people.

homes, boycotted schools ... and a depressed economy ... have bred a 'lost generation' of 'marginalised youth', living outside of the social structures and devoid of the values deemed essential for 'civilised' society". The consequence of the above factors shaped school children into student activists who left school to participate in anti-government and anti-Afrikaans education protests.

The young liberation comrades were hailed by Oliver Tambo in 1985 as "the Young Lions" but their motto, "liberation before education", was to become their downfall (Seekings 1996:104-108; Hawthorne & MacLeod 1991:[sp]). Because thousands of school children joined the struggle against apartheid and Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, they never completed their high school education and because they lacked formal skills, this generation was rendered 'unemployable' and was consequently not absorbed into the labour system (Glaser 1998a:314).

The second aspect of this lost generation became apparent in the aftermath of the struggle years. Many of the struggle heroes and heroines of the turbulent 1980s were left to their own devices and as such comrades and political martyrs were rendered invisible after the early 1990s. As Chabedi (2003:365) remarks, "after 1991, political mobilisation amongst the youth declined markedly ... politics fell out of fashion". There was no need for the youth anymore as the struggle was won.

The author argues that the legacy of a generation of unskilled workers along with contributing factors such as criminal activity and the HIV/AIDS pandemic give rise to today's lost generation.[22] Current absenteeism from school is also reminiscent of the low turnout at schools during the 1970s and 1980s. And if today's pupils repeat the mistakes of their mothers and fathers, a new generation of unskilled workers will be created. Evidence of train surfers being part of this new lost generation is given in Hesselink's

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[22] In Soweto, HIV/AIDS is stigmatised and Sowetans refer to the disease in codes. "The language of AIDS is that of silence. No one dies of HIV/AIDS, rather they die of Z3, Adidas (for the Adidas mark has three lines), and all seem to know what those codes refer to" (Chabedi 2003:369). And regarding youth crime, Statistics South Africa estimates that of the approximately 171 000 people in South African prisons in 2007, 122 000 were between the ages of fourteen and thirty-four years (seventy one per cent) (Kagwanja 2007:4).

(2008:122) study of train surfers. She indicates that train surfers do not attend school regularly and twenty-two per cent of the respondents had failed a grade because of absenteeism due to train surfing. Russouw (2007:7) and Nandipha (2006:33) concur with the above and state that train surfers regularly "bunk school" to "spend their time performing death-defying routines on the top of moving trains or underneath".

It may be argued, however, that the impetus to train surf may be influenced by external factors (such as family structures, gangs, and alcohol/drugs), but the activity itself is a self-made choice. Train surfers choose to 'bunk' school and they choose to train surf and therefore they choose to be part of a new lost generation. To understand how adolescents can choose to be part of a lost generation, the author now turns to the concept of fatalism and train surfing as a fatalistic practice.

4.5   Fatalism

Fatalism is associated with notions such as fate, destiny, predeterminism, and free will. Many philosophers argue that fatalism implies that it is futile to try and change the future and that people are "powerless to do anything other than what [they] actually do" (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Fatalism* 2002:[sp]). Without exploring the various theoretical and philosophical underpinnings to this theory, I argue that train surfers are indeed fatalistic when their marginal status, everyday circumstances, future prospects as well as their own accounts of life, death and the future are taken into account.

The first aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is train surfers' marginal status. Christopher Whelan (1996:34) argues that people who are unemployed for long periods of time, the marginalised and deprived, and those who are part of the underclass tend to be fatalistic regarding their future. As Whelan (1996:46) maintains "marginalisation does have an effect on [one's] level of fatalism" and because working classes and the poor are often marginalised, fatalism as a "feature of working-class life" often prevails. An interpretation of this is that the poor, the sick and other marginal figures accept their 'lot'

in life. For example, if one is unemployed for long periods of time or if one believes that one is unlikely to find employment in the near future, these conditions are

> likely to be associated with or produce feelings of low perceived self-efficacy. People come to seriously doubt that they can accomplish what is expected of them or, even where this is not true, they may give up trying because they consider that their efforts will be futile given the environmental constraints within which they operate (Whelan 1996:34).

In this regard, Scott Cummings (1977:63) argues that marginal figures with a weak sense of fate control "may be fatalistic and pessimistic about their chances for success in life, and pattern their achievement orientations and behaviours accordingly".[23] Whelan (1996:45) adds if people feel they have little control over the things that happen to them or they feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life, they tend to be fatalistic. An example of a train surfer's fatalistic perception of life and death is encapsulated in the *Special Assignment* (2006) documentary. Prince Shiba says that if his friend, Lefa Mzimela, dies there is nothing he could do about it: "a dead man is a dead man. Maybe I would go to his funeral, maybe not, but I would not lose sleep over it". Mzimela also says that "you can only stop if you die or find a job. Going back to the townships and doing nothing sucks" (*Special Assignment* 2006).

The reference by Shiba to the idleness of township life and the ultimatum for stopping train surfing (either find a job or die) shows a "sense of resignation based on the realities of a difficult life-situation [and] cynicism towards established values of work and order" (Whelan 1996:46). As already indicated train surfers are part of Johannesburg's underclass and when they leave school employment prospects are scarce, their outlook on life is fatalistic. Evidence to substantiate this is found in Whelan (1996:46) who states: "fatalism is a variable which appears responsive to the influence of both long-term class experiences [the underclass] and more recent labour-market experience [difficulty in finding employment]".

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[23] Fate control, according to Cummings (1977:63), is the "degree to which individuals feel that they have power over their personal destinies" as well as personal control over the environment in which they live.

Train surfing can be read as a fatalistic, suicidal, risk-taking, or self-destroying act. Barclay Johnson (1965:876) and Peter Bearman (1991:501) state that according to Durkheim "self-destruction occurs with varying frequency in different populations" and is influenced by the degree in which the society or population is integrated and regulated. Bearman (1991:517) also maintains that

> the teen today is often a member of two separate societies, the family of origin and the peer group. In both, the adolescent is integrated, and therefore subject to the normative demands and regulation of each. But the social worlds of the family and the peer group are frequently independent of each other, and the norms governing action and deportment that each society exerts on the teen are, consequently, often experienced as contradictory. Many find it difficult to reconcile the conflicting normative demands entailed by these memberships.

Suicidal tendencies also occur when people experience a prevailing state of fatalism. This state of fatalism occurs when "futures [are] pitilessly blocked and passions violently choked" (Durkheim, quoted in Johnson 1965:877 and Bearman 1991:513). When in such a fatalistic mindset, Richard Taylor (1962:56) argues that the "fatalist ... thinks he cannot do anything about the future ... He thinks that even his own behaviour is not in the least within his power". An example of this mindset in narrated by Train surfer 1:"And to all those who wish for me to die: I do not care because we are going to die" (*Carte Blanche* 2008). This train surfer clearly does not believe that his fate can be determined by his "own agency [and his] own behaviour" (Solomon 2003:452).

Robert Solomon (2003:449) believes that "character and circumstances tell us a great deal about why people do what they do, what their predispositions are to certain kinds of behaviour and their liability for the consequences of that behaviour". Train surfers must know the likely outcome of their behaviour is death, mutilation or gruesome injuries. But because they believe "we are all 'fated' to die", they continue without taking the consequences of their actions into consideration (Solomon 2003:449). To this extent, train surfers inexplicitly refer to the concept of predeterminism, i.e. that their fate is already determined – they will die some sort of gruesome death. Train surfer 5 says: "It is not that I like it when I surf. I have no choice" (*Carte Blanche* 2008). He thus implies that

he has no choice in the matter: he will die while train surfing or he will die by some other means.

The author is also convinced that the HIV/AIDS pandemic influences the thought-patterns and behaviour of train surfers. As Train surfer 5 states: "I need to abstain from this disease. I have to stop you see" (*Carte Blanche* 2008). Although his statement is vague in terms of what he has to stop, the author assumes the train surfer is referring to high risk sexual activities. No evidence of the HIV status of train surfers is given in the existing literature, but "the question 'how long do I have?' has special poignancy ... for those who have reason to think that their time is distinctively limited – patients with AIDS ... for instance" (Solomon 2003:450).

In summation, fatalistic tendencies among train surfers are a result of the specific class from which they emerge, their difficult material circumstances and the fact that future work prospects are bleak as well as their struggle to cope with changes in their familial or societal structures. These factors, thus, cultivate fatalistic mindsets and may lead to the formation of a lost generation. In correlation to this, one can mention Brazil's lack of economic development in the 1980s that produced "a lost decade, even a lost generation" (Broad et. al. 1990:144). During this period Brazilian youth did not foresee "meaningful futures in Rio de Janeiro", and their future outlook gave birth to train surfing (Broad et. al. 1990:144). A father of a train surfer stresses his son's fatalistic outlook: "It is a form of suicide. Brazilian youth is suffering so much, they see no reason to live" (Broad et. al. 1990:145). The similarities related to circumstances in Brazil and South Africa that cultivate train surfing are unmistakable and are discussed in the following section.

4.6   Train surfing in Brazil and South Africa: a brief comparison

Train surfing is not a localised phenomenon and occurs in Germany, Russia, the United States of America, and Brazil, and therefore it becomes imperative to draw a correlation between the circumstances under which train surfing occurs in Brazil and South Africa.

By comparing the two countries it becomes evident that train surfing is more likely to occur when factors such as migration, unemployment, poverty and crime are present. In their study regarding migration and housing mobility, Alan Gilbert and Owen Crankshaw (1999:2375-2376) list the following factors that make South Africa and Brazil suitable for comparison: both countries have similar levels of economic development, highly unequal societies, rapid migration to cities, and there are frequent political protests over service delivery. Both societies are highly urbanised and have been influenced by colonial and racial segregationist practices. Gilbert and Crankshaw (1999:2377) also state that "in terms of per capita income, car ownership, a corporate presence ... infrastructure provision, telecommunications and the size of the middle class, South Africa is much more like Brazil than any part of Africa".

According to Shaw (2002:5) South Africa and Brazil furthermore display similar crime patterns. Crime in both countries affect rich and poor citizens in different ways: "while the wealthy are often victims of property crime, the vast majority of violent crime is concentrated on the periphery of the large cities where the problems of unemployment, lack of basic housing and social services (including policing) are acute" (Shaw 2002:5).

The underclass and working classes in both countries are also located in the same areas, namely slums or informal townships on the outskirts of cities. Jos Rios (1993:161;173) states that Brazil's poor, especially in Rio de Janeiro, reside in poor neighbourhoods and slum areas called *favelas* located on the periphery of cities. Rio de Janeiro (and Johannesburg) gets its labour force from these slum areas and includes: "industrial workers to small employees, tradesmen, office boys, domestic servants" (Rios 1993:162). These labourers "resort to the suburban trains as their easiest and cheapest form of transportation taking them in the early morning to the suburban centre or the central city station and from there in late evenings back to their homes" (Rios 1993:162). This is also true in the South African context as thousands of township residents use trains to commute to Johannesburg's city centre.

Brazil's train surfers have been practicing this dangerous activity far longer than train surfers in Soweto. Since the 1940s and 1950s Brazilians have been grabbing onto the outside railings of trains due to overcrowding and as a way of "evading fares" (Rios 1993:163). But the Brazilian youth did not stop with hanging onto the outsides of trains: in the mid 1980s they expanded their repertoire by travelling on top of moving trains by either "squatting or sitting, even laying on the roof ... [and] by standing and keeping their bodies in balance with the trains' motion" (Rios 1993:163). Fred Khumalo (2006:40) states that train surfers and "staff riders" emerged in Soweto during the late 1970s and they also clung onto trains to evade fares.[24] Figure 24 depicts a staff rider photographed in 1986 on a train bound for Soweto.

Figure 24: Santu Mofokeng, *Staff rider, Soweto-bound train*, 1986.
Silverprint, measurements not supplied.
(http://cargocollective.com/santumofokeng/filter/work#663752/townships).

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[24] Whitehead (2008:33) explains the difference between train surfing and staff riding as follows: "train surfing is when teenagers and children, as young as 12, stand on the roofs of moving trains [and avoid overhead cables that carry 3000 volts]. Staff riding is often done in the last four carriages. Two people hold the doors open and a third passenger holds on to the centre pole and jumps in and out of a moving train".

Other similarities concerning train surfers in both countries are: the Brazilian media named train surfing "a poor's sport" according to Rios (1993:163), and the South African newspaper articles that were studied also hint that disadvantaged youth are more likely to train surf. In both countries train surfers organised themselves into gangs (Rios 1993:163) and in both instances the train surfers are likely to associate themselves with "mythical figures" and take nicknames such as "Rambo, McGiver [and] Kamikase" (Rios 1993:163). Other correlating factors are the gender and ages of train surfers. In both Brazil and South Africa the ages of train surfers range "between 11 and 20" and train surfers are mostly male. In addition the older train surfers in both contexts "had not finished primary instruction and seldom have a qualified job" (Rios 1993:167). Lastly, some train surfers or "hangers-on" admit that they are "small thieves ... who seize the opportunity of the rush hours to grab purses and watches from careless travellers" (Rios 1993:167).

From the above it is evident that young adolescents, who grow up in societies that exhibit certain social pathologies such as high unemployment rates, rapid urbanisation and overcrowding, and high levels of crime, are more likely to engage in dangerous, risk-taking activities. The argument that socio-economic circumstances have a distinct influence on the behaviour of certain groupings of the population (namely the underclass) is thus substantiated when the influence of factors/circumstances is read within the context of two comparable societies (namely Brazil and South Africa).

4.7   Conclusion

This chapter illustrated that train surfers can be grouped into a distinct social class, namely Johannesburg's underclass. The reason for this grouping is that train surfers exhibit certain characteristics that are inherent to the underclass. These include: poverty, marginal status based on limited or no participation in the labour force, and inadequate housing conditions in townships and squatter settlements.

The material living conditions in townships to which train surfers are exposed were explored to substantiate the argument that train surfers indeed originate from the underclass but also to show that material living conditions contribute to the way in which people perceive the world and navigate space. Factors such as failing family structures and absent fathers, gangs, drug/alcohol abuse and the production of threatened masculinities were investigated to establish reasons why train surfers find train surfing attractive.

Thereafter the origin of Soweto's lost generation was traced to probe what effects the legacy of student protests and the subsequent lack of formal skills had on a generation of adolescents. HIV/AIDS, absenteeism from school and the activity of train surfing were proposed as current factors that render train surfers part of a new lost generation. Train surfers' outlook on life and their perception of future control were analysed and it was established that because they feel they have no control over the future and the likely outcomes of their dangerous activity, they are fatalistic. Lastly, similar factors present in Brazil and South Africa, such as high unemployment rates, poor housing conditions and high levels of crime, were presented in order to substantiate the argument that if these conditions are present in a society, it is likely that it could cultivate dangerous activities such as train surfing.

The next chapter investigates train surfing as risk-taking behaviour and how this behaviour can lead to the development of a new spatial practice. Issues such as power, agency and resistance are explored to establish whether train surfing can be regarded as a form of de-alienation. Lastly, train surfing is interpreted as a way of rewriting specific urban experiences.

CHAPTER FIVE
TRAIN SUFRING AS A RISK-TAKING ACTIVITY
AND A NEW SPATIAL PRACTICE

5.1   Introduction

Train surfing is a multi-facetted activity that should not only be interpreted as a fatalistic practice, but also as a risk-taking activity that is both anti-social and delinquent. As such, this chapter positions train surfing as a risk-taking activity by giving an overview of the dynamics of risk-taking. It is proposed that risk-taking activities are practised by marginalised individuals in order to give meaning to their lives. As marginalised individuals have little control over socio-economical factors, they exert control over their bodies and thus participate in high risk activities where they can experience so-called 'gains' or benefits. These perceived gains associated with high risk activities are explored alongside a brief overview of risk-takers' psychological motivation for participating in dangerous activities such as train surfing.

As risk-taking behaviour is always practised at a specific place and in space one needs to investigate the specific spatial context within which train surfing occurs. Soja and Lefebvre's theories on space are scrutinised to frame the socially constructed environments wherein train surfing is practised. Here reference is made to perceptions of Johannesburg, Soweto and Soweto's train stations. It is argued that because train surfing occurs in alienating spaces, the spatial realm of train surfing produces subversive spatial practices. As such space is interpreted as one additional factor that influences individuals to participate in high risk activities.

Another pertinent aspect, of this chapter, is how train surfing figures as a unique spatial practice. Train surfing is read as a new form of mobility that acts as a way of reclaiming agency in post-authoritarian Johannesburg. Train surfing as spatial practice is furthermore regarded as a way of remapping and reinterpreting city space. Lastly, notions such as alienation and de-alienation are discussed alongside theories of Debord, De

Certeau, and Lefebvre. Their theories on space and agency are incorporated to demonstrate that spatial practices, like train surfing, act as mediating forces that can turn alienated individuals into individuals who have regained some degree of agency and are therefore 'liberated'.

5.2 Train surfing as risk-taking behaviour

A broad definition of risk-taking behaviour includes any behaviour or activity that involves a high risk or that can be classified as dangerous. Risk-taking can furthermore be interpreted as a continuum that ranges from socially acceptable to anti-social behaviour. In general, socially acceptable risk-taking behaviour includes extreme sports such as rock climbing, skydiving, base jumping, and off-road motorbike racing. Activities such as petty theft, gambling, drug/alcohol abuse, and train surfing can be categorised as anti-social high risk behaviour. For the purposes of this dissertation high risk-taking behaviour among adolescents (and in particular the subculture of train surfers) and their motivations for participating in dangerous activities are discussed.

David Le Breton (2004:1) explores high risk-taking behaviour and states that risk-taking is more prevalent among young, marginalised people who live on the fringes of society because they find it hard to construct meaningful lives. For Le Breton (2004:2), adolescents' risk-taking behaviour is

> rooted in general suffering and a confused feeling that something is missing in their lives. There is no intention of actually dying, but rather of testing out their personal determination, of finding an intensity of being, a moment of supreme being, giving voice to a cry or expressing suffering.

Young, marginalised individuals are acutely aware of the risks they take while participating in dangerous activities, but they convince themselves that they want to live and die on their own accord and not according to established societal norms.[1] This perceived notion of having power and control over life and death, in turn, stimulates "a

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[1] Train surfing can be described as a high risk practice because "a very negative outcome is ... nearly certain" (Parker & Stanworth 2005:320). In train surfing the possibility that one might die is very high, but train surfers still choose to participate in this activity as they wish to live and die on their own accord.

feeling of freedom: they are conquering their fear by going beyond it" (Le Breton 2004:2). It is proposed that risk-takers are confronted with various paradoxes. Firstly, they live in a media/information society that relishes in the so-called freedom associated with extreme sports.[2] This is a society where the accepted notions of prescribed limits have faded and there are no unconquered frontiers except the final frontier, death. Secondly, because of their marginalised position they feel entrapped in a society that places too many constraints on their lives and that the only 'place' where they can exert control, is over their own body, as well as how and when they are going to die.[3] To this extent, Le Breton (2004:2) states that "young people ... adopt ... behaviors of symbolically soliciting death in their search to find limits so that they may exist".[4] The "limits" Le Breton refers to have a dual meaning: firstly, risk-takers push their bodies to their physical/physiological limits; and secondly, they experience a mental/psychological feat when they come close to death without actually dying, that is, testing the boundary between life and death. In the context of young adolescents' behaviour, risk-taking takes on a different quality – it assists in the search for meaning and identity. It furthermore becomes a means to ensure "that one's life has a value and [it diminishes] the fear of personal insignificance" (Le Breton 2004:3).

Cultural rights are associated with the formation of new identities and the search for a place in society. As such, risk-taking is seen as a rite of passage for some, and risk-taking acts as representing "transitional moments", while risk-takers' bodies are seen as "transitional object[s] thrown harshly at the world in order to pursue a path full of confusion" (Le Breton 2004:3).[5] However, high risk practices as rites of passage differ from traditional, culturally prescribed rituals in at least four ways. In traditional societies ceremonies are conducted by elders, whereas the induction into the train surfing

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[2] Catherine Palmer (2002:325) states "the intensity of belonging to a culture of extremity is repeatedly amplified through the media" and that we live in a "risk society" wherein the media portrays "dangerous behaviour" as being "cool".

[3] Le Breton (2004:6) agrees with this proposal, by stating "during adolescence ... the body becomes the battleground for one's identity" and taking control of one's body becomes "the sole means of taking possession of one's existence".

[4] One train surfer states that he and his fellow surfers "have to face fear to check our limits" (Rios 1993:169).

[5] See John Kafka (1969:207) who states that the body is a transitional object.

subculture is by peers or people of the same age group. Secondly, contemporary risk-taking rites of passage are "deeply solitary events [and] they occur in a context of ruptures in social links" (Le Breton 2004:13). In contrast, rites of passage in traditional societies are collective events where groups of adolescents participate in certain rituals. The third difference is that contemporary risk-taking rites of passage are at odds with socially acceptable norms and values. But in traditional societies rites of passage such as initiation schools are widely accepted. Lastly, contemporary rites of passage often "give rise to pain for parents [that is] in sharp contrast to the joy experienced by parents in traditional societies" (Le Breton 2004:13). In substantiation of the notion that contemporary risk-taking activities are rites of passage, Le Breton (2004:14) as well as John Parker and Hilary Stanworth (2005:320) argue that risk-taking behaviours produce a feeling of "being an adult" and it may further lead to "a feeling of personal rebirth and is a form of self-initiation". This self-initiation into the subculture of train surfing is a powerful occurrence in the lives of train surfers because they regard themselves as 'real' men and not boys after they have participated in this high risk act.

In the case of train surfing initiation or induction is preceded by imitation. According to Hesselink (2008:122), the youngest interviewee started train surfing at the age of 14 and all the train surfers stated that they were introduced to this risky practice by a male friend. Hesselink (2008:122-123) states that there are various methods of induction used to attract young men to train surf. The most prominent of these is imitation. Young boys watch others who train surf and become fascinated by the activity. After watching boys who train surf, the non-participants are normally approached by a 'seasoned' train surfer, who shows the non-participant a few stunts on a platform. The inductee is thereafter encouraged and challenged to try the stunt on a moving train.[6]

With this basic background of risk-taking the author now attempts to explain why train surfing is regarded as a form of risk-taking behaviour. Train surfing, however, escapes a clear-cut definition because although train surfing is a high risk activity, it also

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[6] Initiation and induction practices among train surfers in South Africa and Brazil are very similar. Rios (1993:169) states that in Brazil, leaders impose a test on newcomers. They have to imitate the leaders by "making a full turn around the wagon [train carriage] while it keeps moving".

incorporates a delinquent dimension. To clarify this statement, a definition of delinquent behaviour is necessary. Delinquent behaviour is categorised according to what is acceptable in a certain society, that is, whether the activity can be regarded as unlawful or not. In South Africa, train surfing is regarded as illegal, and although no criminal laws prohibit the act, Metrorail security officials on trains and at train stations try to enforce strict rules and regulations regarding train safety. When train surfers are caught, their parents are notified and the parents are left to decide on a suitable form of punishment. Underage train surfers are not charged with any crime, but Metrorail urges these surfers to attend safety awareness programmes. Because no laws exist that prohibit train surfing, at worst, older, adult surfers might be charged with vandalism (Whitehead 2008:33).

Evidence to support the claim that train surfing is both a risk-taking and delinquent activity is found in the media's portrayal thereof. Fred Khumalo (2006:40), a journalist for the *Sunday Times*, stresses the high risk factor by calling train surfing "Russian roulette with a local twist". The delinquent aspect of the activity is highlighted by Poloko Tau, a journalist for the *Star* (2007). Tau quotes former transport minister Jeff Radebe who describes train surfing as an "abhorrent and disturbing activity" (Tau 2007:3). Train surfing has also been branded as "distorted heroism" (Khumalo 2006:40; Hesselink 2008:129). Clearly train surfing has a negative stigma and is regarded as an undesirable activity that entails very high risk.

Although the media explicitly mentions the risk involved in train surfing, the high risk factor is often minimised (downplayed) by the risk-takers (*Special Assignment* 2006; *Sky News* 2006; *Carte Blanche* 2008). Brenda Robertson (1994:30) states that delinquent behaviour is often theorised by individuals as a "game ... the object of the game is to complete the task without getting caught". Le Breton (2004:5) believes that in activities where death is often imminent, "awareness of death may add spice to the act ... those who [undertake] the task ... are convinced they will get through it with distinction and courage". Accordingly, train surfers often call train surfing a sport or even a game. Tshepiso Ntohla states that "there is no space for fear in this game" (Dlamini 2006:[sp]). And as Rider explains: "I surf to entertain. This is the only sport I play. We call it

'running', 'extreme sports', 'real play'. This is our sport. If it was [sic] legal, I would be president" (*Carte Blanche* 2008). While train surfing is evidently both a delinquent and risk-taking activity that is believed to usher young boys into adulthood, the motivations behind risk-taking behaviour have to be considered.

5.2.1   'Gains' associated with risk-taking behaviour

Risk-taking behaviour is not a neutral concept that always involves possible loss, for example losing one's life or limbs, or sustaining serious injuries. In this regard, Parker and Stanworth (2005:319) assert that risk-taking may take on positive meanings, because although risk-taking may cause one's death, there are so-called 'gains' that afford pleasure and entice the risk-taker to partake in extreme practices.[7] Examples of 'benefits' or 'gains' in the case of train surfing include: "status; being one of the boys; the opportunity to [prove oneself] to others; to get girls; being a hero; and being cool and in" (Hesselink 2008:125).[8] Le Breton also believes that, although risk-taking is associated with suffering, it has a positive side. He states that risk-taking encourages "adolescents to be independent and find their boundaries, to develop a better self-image and build an identity" (Le Breton 2004:2).

To elaborate on the perceived gains experienced by Sowetan surfers and how this leads to building an identity, the author turns to Hesselink (2008:123) who documents train surfers' motivation behind this extreme activity:

1.   To see who can surf best;
2.   I am young and it is an 'in thing.' It is also fun and adventurous;
3.   It is a different kind of sport for me because I am talented at what I do. I do not like soccer like most boys from the township. I am unique and brave. I play dangerous and different sport;

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[7] Robertson (1994:30) writes that delinquent behaviour can also be associated with rewards, whether it be social (status) or material (money, objects) for the participant. This is substantiated by a train surfer who says: "The wind is strong, but the risk is worthwhile" (Rios 1993:169).

[8] The gains mentioned by Soweto's train surfers are similar to the benefits or attractive qualities listed by Brazilian train surfers. Rios (1993:170-171) documents these benefits as follows: "there is nothing better than surfing ... it is like an addiction"; train surfing is a "source of prestige and glamour"; and brave train surfers are "appreciated by the girls". The gains mentioned are in line with Parker and Stanworth's (2005:326) stance that high risk activities are undertaken to "prove competence" to girls, "but also to mediate nature and to secure approval" from their peers.

4.   I love it ... it is fun ... I am a star at what I do; and
5.   It is fun and an adventure. To prove that you are strong and that you are a man and not a boy.

The above-mentioned reasons tie in with the argument that train surfers' perception of risks is minimised and the perceived gains are maximised in a naïve attempt to justify and glorify their behaviour. The author is of the opinion that the process of diminishing the actual threat and danger associated with train surfing is done subconsciously because the fear of dying has to be masked in some way. Fears of death, gruesome injuries, and mutilation are cloaked by words such as "fun", "adventurous", "brave", "star", and "strong". These selected words not only point to benefits, but also to train surfers' active image/identity construction. Connotations to these words evoke images of brave heroes who are adored and admired for their adventurous exploits.[9] Rios (1993:174) states that Brazilian train surfers similarly are also involved in the "making up of myths which help them to relieve their harsh daily reality, upgrading it to a dreamlike way of life". Active identity construction and focusing on perceived gains are therefore regarded as main grounds for risk-taking behaviour.

Other than obtaining so-called gains, risk-taking behaviour can be interpreted as a response to societal problems, poverty and failing family structures. These aforementioned issues were discussed at length in Chapter Four as factors that can be attributed to influencing train surfers. In addition to the impetuses discussed in Chapter Four, adolescent's psychological motivations are explored to offer another explanation for individuals' participation in high risk or delinquent activities.

In this respect, Le Breton (2004:4) argues that risk-taking behaviours "refer to unconscious motivations when adolescents feel that meaning is crushed, that their life is worthless ... and this is resolved in a tension-releasing act". The fatalistic act of train surfing illustrates that train surfers indeed feel that their lives are worthless and that 'meaning is crushed'. An answer to meaningless lives is the exhibition of fearless identities and showcasing of special (train surfing) skills. This is also true in the case of

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[9] Palmer (2002:333) states that the "discourse of extremity is unquestionably highly gendered" and that there are "cultural boundaries placed on being a hero". Men can comfortably be placed in this category when they perform so-called brave and adventurous acts.

Brazilian train surfers. Rios (1993:170-171) highlights the psychological underpinnings that motivate adolescents to engage in train surfing: "the need to break the condition of anonymity and to emerge from the herd with an individual profile and a name; the identification with a hero ... to identify with idealised, even mythical figures, as built up by the media; [and] to taste the breaking of rules". Le Breton (2004:10) furthermore states that "the fact of being born or growing up is no longer sufficient to ensure one's rightful place in the social web today; one has to conquer the right to exist". This proposition that individuals need to find a place in society and that risk-taking behaviour and rebellious acts are avenues to accomplish this, points to the fact that adolescents are not passive subjects, but rather active agents. Risk-taking is therefore seen not only as a way of expressing one's identity, but also as a form of

> human agency because, as products of their relations with nature, practice and society, humans are constituted as social beings with sufficient autonomy to commit themselves (Parker & Stanworth 2005:327).

To summarise, risk-takers (train surfers) are regarded as marginal, peripheral and alienated individuals who engage in high risk activities to exert control over their lives. Modern risk-taking behaviour is interpreted as a rite of passage that involves obtaining various gains, namely: to escape, to express identity, to rebel against social injustices, and to be integrated with society, that is, to be accepted into either a subculture or a gang.

Although socio-economic circumstances and psychological motivations are regarded as impetuses for adolescents' involvement in high risk activities, the author proposes that the place(s) and space(s) that individuals inhabit can be regarded as factors that can produce risk-taking behaviour. If adolescents live in alienating spaces, space can produce subversive risk-taking behaviour. As such train surfing is not only interpreted as risk-taking behaviour, but as an agency-giving spatial practice. Train surfing therefore has another purpose: the remapping of city space as a means of de-alienation. It is proposed that train surfing has the ability to change alienated passive subjects into active agents, because the practice itself has symbolic meaning and stimulates a sense of freedom in participants. Train surfing can furthermore be interpreted as a spatial practice because train surfers are actively engaging with their environment and changing the dystopia or

alienated city into a site of freedom. As a prologue to train surfing as spatial practice, Lefebvre and Soja's theories of space is discussed alongside a brief journey into the specific spaces (Johannesburg as city, Soweto as township, and train stations as non-places) that train surfers inhabit. Here reference is made to the alienating properties of these spaces to substantiate the argument that alienating or estranging place(s) and space(s) may produce risk-taking behaviour.

5.3   Theories 'grounding' space

As introduction to this section, an attempt is made to differentiate between the terms 'place' and 'space'. It is necessary to define these terms as "space is more abstract than place", and because these constructs require each other for definition, states Yi-Fu Tuan (1977:6). What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as one gets to know it better and endows it with value. Space is thus transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning.

The process of attaching meaning to a space or place is called social spatialisation, writes Rob Shields (1991:7). This process involves people's labelling and ascribing purposes to spaces and places based on their perception and experience of the space or place. Once meaning is attached to a space or place, one can choose to contest or negotiate the established meaning. Space is, therefore, not a neutral backdrop for human activity as it embodies cultural, political and psychological phenomena. To this extent, space is regarded as a social construct.[10] Furthermore, space cannot be seen as unaffected by changing social practices. As Shields (1991:30) states: "a space denotes a limited area: a site, zone or place characterised by specific social activities with a culturally given identity (name) and image".

To elaborate on the impact social relations have on space, the author turns to Edward Soja (1980:207) who coined the term "the social-spatial dialectic". Soja (1980:211) states that "social and spatial relationships are dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent; that

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[10] Compare Cavallaro (2001:170).

social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent". Because social practices influence and form space, space is also regarded as political. When social activities such as the exercise of ideological power is practised within a space, that space becomes endowed with social meaning, rendering the space a product of (ideological) politics. As Henri Lefebvre (1976:31) states:

> space is not a scientific object removed from ideology and politics; it has always been political and strategic. If space has an air of neutrality and indifference with regard to its contents and thus seems to be 'purely' formal, the epitome of rational abstraction, it is precisely because it has been occupied and used, and has already been the focus of past processes whose traces are not always evident on the landscape. Space has been shaped and molded from historical and natural elements, but this has been a political process. Space is political and ideological. It is a product literally filled with ideologies.

Therefore, "a place is nothing by itself, it depends on other places and practices to give it meaning" (Shields 1991:52). Spaces and places are constructed in terms of gender, class, race, ethnicity, capitalism, ideological frameworks and the power of governments. This indicates that symbolic and material powers, as well as value systems play a role in the social production of space.

The social production of the spatial can furthermore be discussed alongside Lefebvre's (1991) spatial ontology in the form of a three-tier analysis.[11] According to Lefebvre, spatial production/construction can be divided into three categories. The first category, spatial practice, "embodies a close association, with perceived space, between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure)" (Lefebvre 1991:38). Daily activities such as travelling to work, eating, sleeping and relaxing are regarded as spatial practices, as these serve as cohesive activities – activities all citizens/people engage in. Here, society as a whole is compartmentalised into different spaces: work, home and leisure. These demarcated spaces also require "a specific level of *performance*" from citizens: certain activities are associated with work, home and leisure spaces and citizens must perform

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[11] See Cavallaro (2001:171) and Arnade, Howell and Simons' (2002:517-518) discussion of Lefebvre's theory. Soja (1996:73) also states that "existential spatiality of life is a balance trialectic that ranges from ontology through to a consciousness and *praxis* that is also simultaneously and presuppositionally social, historical and *spatial*" (emphasis in original).

work duties, household duties and leisure activities as soon as they enter one of these spaces (emphasis in original, Lefebvre 1991:33).

The second category, representations of space, is "conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers" (Lefebvre 1991:38). According to Peter Arnade, Martha Howell and Walter Simons (2002:517-518), this category refers to "abstract concepts that organise space such as architectural plans, street maps or laws that regulate the use of space". It also encompasses how spaces are planned, designed and envisioned by architects/urban planners as well as how the world is conceived or thought about by ordinary people.

The last category, representational spaces, embody "complex symbolisms ... linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life" and are spaces "directly *lived* through its associated images and symbols" (emphasis in original, Lefebvre 1991:33;39). Arnade et. al. (2002:517-518) define this category as "lived space ... the level at which people unconsciously respond and represent it in symbols". In summary, this category enshrines how the world is lived through one's body and how one experiences space.

Lefebvre furthermore differentiates between physical, mental and social space. Physical space is nature, mental space is the realm of "logical and formal abstractions", and social space is a "social construct" and is the space of social relationships where social actions are taken by subjects (Lefebvre 1991:11;26). If one assigns names, descriptions and categorisations to space, as demonstrated above, space becomes a text that can be read or decoded. As Lefebvre (1991:7) explains:

> any attempt to use such codes [semiology and language] as a means of deciphering social space must surely reduce that space itself to the status of a *message*, and the inhabiting of it to the status of a *reading* [emphasis in original].

Therefore, any reading of space "implies signification" (Lefebvre 1991:17): people 'read' space, act within space, follow visual clues, decode signs and symbols, and thus comprehend the space they inhabit or move through. This, once again, stresses the notion that space is a social construct, because space is appropriated through social practices, whether those practices are spatial, cultural, economic or political.

Another important aspect of Lefebvre's theory is that space is produced and has a distinct history. The "historicity of space" indicates that space is a "multivalent concept, a complex product of apprehension, experience, and reification" (Arnade et. al. 2002:522). To gain insight into the history of certain spaces, Arnade et. al. suggest three lenses to interpret space. These lenses are legal space, ritual space and mental space. Legal space encompasses private and public property rights and ownership, as well as, control over urban space (Arnade et. al. 2002:523). To some extent, Arnade et. al.'s legal space is related to Lefebvre's physical space category. People interact with nature or a physical environment to draw boundaries around places that they want to inhabit. The meaning of the second lens, namely, ritual space, is established through rituals that are performed in these spaces, such as religious ritual and worship in churches and cathedrals. In this regard, Arnade et. al. (2002:526) state that "battles for space were in fact battles for performance rights in space". Performance rights, in this context, are associated with power. People establish markets, build houses and parks, erect walls and fences to delineate territories so that they can exercise power and control. This is the space of social practice: the establishment of work, communal/public and private spaces where owners can exercise power. Here, space acquires meaning "through performances" and "those enacting the performances staged new social practices and subtly altered the representational or symbolic resonance of their space" (Arnade et. al. 2002:527). This category is in line with Lefebvre's social practice, as rituals or performance rights are socially constructed events that give meaning to space. Lastly, mental space is "more imagined than enacted" (Arnade et. al. 527). Mental space has associations attached to it, for example, the home is associated with domesticity, women and privacy. This lens is also in accordance with Lefebvre's mental space category that is based on associations attached to certain spaces or places.

In summary, urbanites attach meaning to places and spaces and the attached meaning is always negotiated. Space is, therefore, a social construct that is shaped by social, cultural and political practices. Urbanites engage with spaces by 'reading' it, interpreting the space's history and by comprehending spatial clues inscribed in space. The next section

investigates the specific perceptions and interpretations of the place(s) and space(s) train surfers occupy, namely Johannesburg, the township of Soweto and train stations.

5.3.1 Perceptions and interpretations of Johannesburg, Soweto and township train stations

Now that the basic theories of space have been outlined, relevant aspects of these theories are used to adjust the focus to specific places. Johannesburg as city space and Soweto as township space are read as social (political) constructs. Thereafter the unique spatial position of train surfing is placed under a magnifying glass as train surfing occurs between train stations on railway tracks. This unique spatial position is analysed as non-place. The author wishes to stress that in this section she will not necessarily use a chronological order to analyse city space, but she will rather follow her own mental map of city space as outlined above.

The author regards the city of Johannesburg as a historical, social and political construct. Therefore, the author agrees with Michel De Certeau (1988:92) who states that the city is a "readable" text, and as such it is attempted to decode the historical, social and political peculiarities of this specific space. As outlined in Chapter Three, the historicity of Johannesburg can be viewed as both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct. In its authoritarian phase, capitalistic impetuses such as the discovery of gold on the Witwatersrand (1886) shaped its space.[12] Evidence of this social-spatial construction is found in Soja (1980:221) who states: "the capitalist mode of production actively creates, intensifies, and seeks to maintain regional or, more broadly, spatial inequalities as a means for its own survival". In the case of Johannesburg, spaces were created for the rich (mining magnates) and for the poor (immigrants, miners) that clearly indicates that capital created spatial inequalities. The control over space is, furthermore, inherent to "the survival of capitalism" and depends "upon this distinctive occupation and production

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[12] Achille Mbembe (2004) also argues Johannesburg is a product of capitalism. He states that from the late nineteenth century "Johannesburg has always imagined itself to be a modern city. Early on, it developed along utilitarian and functional lines, with a clear delineation between the zones of work, living, recreation, and transportation" (Mbembe 2004:376-377). Capitalism, as social construct, creates different zones or spaces wherein citizens can function.

of space, achieved through bureaucratically controlled consumption, the differentiation of centres and peripheries, and the penetration of the state into everyday life" (Soja 1980:215). In Johannesburg the creation of centres (affluent neighbourhoods) and peripheries (townships) were not only based on capitalistic notions, but also on race and political (ideological) agendas. As such Johannesburg evolved from a historical construct into a racial city or political construct. The racial city had clear class distinctions and segregation practices that divided the spatial character of the city into zones for the rich and the poor – zones that only housed whites and zones set-aside for blacks, immigrants, and migrant labourers.[13]

Because social relations shaped the physical space of Johannesburg, it obtained significance when individuals laid claim to it and bestowed meaning upon the space, thus "assigning [a specific] character" to space (Arnade et. al. 2002:540). Space in itself is not always associated with power relations, but as soon as spaces are "embodied [with society's] ideologies" space contains "the material technology of power" (Arnade et. al. 2002:540). During Johannesburg's authoritarian phase, apartheid spatial policies and laws controlled spaces. When power is inscribed in space, inhabitants of these spaces can choose to resist the established power relations. Achille Mbembe (2004:388) states that "illegal residence and work in the city were only part of an array of tactics [of black people] that included pass law evasions, squatter struggles, various forms of boycott, and campaigns of defiance and civil disobedience". Here Mbembe refers to squatting outside demarcated 'black' spaces such as compounds and townships, and resistance against racism, prescriptive laws and prohibition by the state. Apartheid's spatial segregation practices had the "ability to hide, protect, shelter, divide, or display people" and because of this, certain spaces within the city acquired certain meanings, for example, the underclass was 'hidden' in townships and townships were seen (by white residents) as dangerous places (Arnade et. al. 2002:542).[14]

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[13] Mbembe (2004:397) writes that the racial city is "a spatially bounded entity with a recognisable centre and public and shared spaces (streets, squares, parks, cafes, libraries, galleries, leisure and recreational facilities), its boundaries demarcated through planning, architectural rules, transport and communication networks, and specific art forms". For Mbembe (2004:398) the city became a racial city due to segregation.
[14] Zygmunt Bauman (2000) alludes to the fact that certain city spaces are hidden or left out of city dwellers' mental map of the city. Bauman (2000:104) states that "each map has its empty space though on different

Other conceptions of cities, applicable to Johannesburg, are the city as organism, the city in crisis, and the city as image or product. To begin with, the city can be conceived as a living or "evolving entity" because it is "capable of suffering and recuperation, of injury and recovery, and even of massive destruction and Phoenix-like rebirth", state Jane Schneider and Ida Susser, (quoted in Murray 2005:243).[15] As such, one can use metaphors to describe the city in order to transform physical space into representational space. Here, the metaphor of the city as body is applicable. Johannesburg has indeed suffered during its authoritarian period, but with the advent of the post-authoritarian phase, the city has been reborn. To view the city as cohesive whole might be overly simplistic, as the city may seem to function properly although there are still inequalities such as poverty and decay present. An example hereof is Johannesburg's townships that are still regarded as being 'amputated' or 'dislocated' from the cohesive 'body' of the city.

The metaphor of an organic city that is recuperating from past injustices is related to the city in crisis or the wounded city. Here Johannesburg's transitional qualities intrinsic to the post-authoritarian period are emphasised. Issues such as rising crime, deeply entrenched poverty and dislocation are characteristic of the wounded city. As a result of "the apparent fatalism of urban residents in the face of grave risk and the emergence of more predatory and violence forms of criminality", citizens of these cities (such as Mexico City) express their feelings through "ritual elaboration of death through public commemorations (Day of the Dead)" states Martin Murray (2005:245).[16] Johannesburg is conceived as a wounded city because it has a large underclass, it experiences high levels of violent crime and various marginal figures inhabit the city. Due to these 'wounds', the author argues that train surfers also employ a 'ritual' to express their fatalistic outlook. Their ritual, train surfing, is not in the form of a commemoration, as in Mexico City, but

maps they are located in different places ... cutting out such places allows the rest to shine and bristle with meaning. The emptiness of place is in the eye of the beholder".
[15] See Maria Daskalaki, Alexandra Stara and Miguel Imas (2008:60) who also read the city as a "living" entity or organism.
[16] See Anton Rosenthal (2000:53) who elaborates on the point of fear inherent to 'wounded cities' in South America.

rather a solitary act to defy death or a fleeting performance to overcome their disparate circumstances.

Finally, 'the city as image,' to use Kevin Lynch's term, is also applicable to Johannesburg. Murray (2005:239) explains:

> cities are not just aggregations, or accumulations, of buildings varying in size and shape, streets and passageways, configured landscapes, population densities socio-economic relationships ... but also repositories of imagined pasts and futures, sites of memory and nostalgia, and show-cases for the visual display of symbols and images.

Murray's quotation is related to Lefebvre's representational space, the realm of symbols and images. It stresses that cities are not only created by utilising physical space (buildings, highways, suburbs) and social space (social relationships), but are also constructs that have histories where historic time implies memory, forgetting and nostalgia. Mbembe (2004:404) states that the "unconscious of a city is made up of different layers of historical time superimposed on one another".[17] Cities furthermore display their histories through the use of images and signs, making physical space, representational space. The most prominent feature of Johannesburg's post-authoritarian image, according to Brenda Yeoh (2001:458), is "toponymic inscription". This inscription entails both remembering and forgetting the past. Johannesburg remembers its heroes and thus maintains links with the past through the erection of monuments, memorials and museums (Hecter Pieterson memorial, Constitution Hill museum). And it forgets its past through the process of renaming streets (Hendrik Verwoerd Drive renamed Malibongwe Drive).

The newly 'imagined' city image is one that emphasises harmony, tolerance and diversity, and has moved away from its authoritarian image of division (Yeoh 2001:460). As such, Johannesburg has become

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[17] Lefebvre (1991:36) also states that the city has "an underground and repressed life, and hence an 'unconscious' of its own". De Certeau (1988:108) also alludes to the city's unconscious or memory-bank by stating: "there is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits [memories] hidden there in silence, spirits one can 'invoke' or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in".

> a *product* that is marked, measured, marketed, and transacted. It is a commodity. And as such, its representational form has become every more stylised (emphasis in original, Mbembe 2004:393).

Large cities around the world are homogenised: they all have city centres with skyscrapers, highways, sprawl, and large shopping centres that again accentuate separate spaces for home, work, and leisure. The city is therefore seen as a product of late capitalism, and in order to be marketable, the city has to differentiate itself from its homogenised counterparts. In order to do this, the city becomes a spectacle through the use of billboards, advertising, hotels, casinos, and museums. These spaces and their advertising material are aimed at different target audiences, for example Melrose Arch and gated communities (as forms of new urbanism) connote security and an imagined community. Therefore, city space has become a product, a commodity that can be consumed through images and representational space.

The relevance of analysing the broader context wherein train surfing occurs is that it, firstly, establishes Johannesburg as a social, political and historical construct, and secondly, frames train surfers' specific form of urbanism. It is proposed that train surfers inhabit certain sectors of this city and are, therefore, influenced by the various mental associations related to this post-modern city. The next section narrows the focus to the township of Soweto and outlines various perceptions of township space.

Social practices, like apartheid policies, shaped townships into peripheral entities and stereotyped township residents. Laura Huey and Thomas Kemple (2007:2306) describe the representational space of townships/squatter settlements as "social container[s] for transient or ambiguously located individuals marked as uniquely immoral, pathological, delinquent or simply 'deviant'". The physical space of townships, like Soweto, is typified by "chronic overcrowding, extreme poverty, dilapidated housing and inadequate access to safe water and sanitation" (Huey & Kemple 2007:2311). In Chapter Three Soweto was described as both marginal and hybrid space. It is a marginal space due to its physical location – on the periphery of Johannesburg – and because the poor underclass, who are marginalised by reason of their economic and class status, live there. Soweto is also conceptualised as a hybrid space due to the mixture of ethnicities, cultures, and

architectural styles present in the township. Soweto as hybrid space furthermore points to the notion that it is an ever-changing, fluctuating space. As such, it is a zone of "transition" (Huey & Kemple 2007:2307). As a zone of transition, townships like Soweto, contain different forms of mobility. AbdouMaliq Simone (2004:19-20) corroborates this point by stating that the African city is "a space of intensified movement – encompassing migration, displacement, and, and accelerated social mobility". In this respect, Soweto also experiences migration to cities, squatter residents who are waiting to move to formal housing, and social mobility as a result of the establishment of a new black middle class. Township space is, thus, a construct that is constantly in flux. Its meaning can be negotiated and contested, and it can be interpreted as either being an alienating space or a space of new opportunities.

Now that various perceptions regarding the broader context (Johannesburg) and train surfers' space of habitation (township of Soweto) have been established, it is necessary to focus on the immediate (physical) space where train surfing occurs, namely at and between train stations. Johannesburg and Soweto are places that function within the social-spatial dialectic as they both have an identity and a history. Soweto's train stations, on the other hand, are non-places that, according to Marc Augé (1995:77-78), "cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity". Augé (1995:78) proposes that supermodernity has produced non-anthropological places that include "transit points" such as airports, train stations, highway networks, and "temporary abodes" such as hotel chains, casinos, shopping malls, townships and refugee camps. Another difference between anthropological places and non-places is that the former creates social spaces with social relations, whereas the latter creates "solitary contractuality [and] the link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the mediation of words, or even texts" (Augé 1995:94).

Soweto's train stations classify as non-places as they are devoid of local references, they are transit points that only link the township to the city, and are sites of physical movement and mobility. Passengers interact with texts such as the name of the station, the number of the platform, timetables and safety instructions, and these texts or

"instructions for use" are either "prescriptive, prohibitive [or] informative" (Augé 1995:96).[18] The train station as non-place is furthermore a solitary space, where strangers have little or no identity. The 'contractuality' Augé refers to, is explained as a contract between user of non-space and the space or the "powers that govern it" (Augé 1995:101). An example hereof is a train passenger who must buy a ticket that allows him to use the non-place and as a user he must "prove his innocence" (Augé 1995:102). Huey and Kemple's (2007:2308) interpretation of non-place users are "those who occupy or move through this liminal sphere maintain a timeless, generic or even non-identity".

Based on the above, the author is of the opinion that Soweto's train stations are non-places in the sense that they are alienated environments of transience and that non-place users are depicted as passive, faceless individuals who are part of a homogeneous crowd, and who are helpless against the controlling forces that govern non-places. However, the author agrees with Augé (1995:78) that non-places never exist in "pure form", and therefore, as space is symbolic and produced through social relations, a "control-resistance dialectic" exists (Daskalaki et. al. 2008:50). Following a constructivist view, spaces can be appropriated by users who subvert original uses of space. Train surfers actively use train stations and participate in giving new meaning to the non-place (Daskalaki et. al. 2008:50). The act of commuting and using the train station as a point of departure/arrival is transformed into a game (train surfing). Other objects that are governed by the rules of the non-place (train station) are trains and railway tracks. These objects are regarded as extensions of the non-place and fall under its governance.

Not only is the train an extension of non-place, it also signifies technological progress, alienation and transportation. Urbanisation and new technologies are replacing nature with cities and various technological modes of transport. Such a form of technology that cleaves through nature is the train on its railway tracks. The train as technological instrument, furthermore, conquers nature. Nicholas Daly (1999:56) states that "the railway is more than just another piece of Victorian technology... for Victorian Britain it

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[18] Daskalaki et. al. (2008:54) elaborate on this point and state "the prescriptive monologue of non-places denies engagement and exploration and mutes the inexhaustible possibilities of genuine (public) space".

was both an agent and icon of modernisation". Daly (1999:57) further draws on Wolfgang Schivelbusch who writes that the train and railway "transformed the country, blurring the lines between rural and urban, facilitating the growth of the major cities, and in effect, annihilating an older perception of time and space". In addition to this, Laura Watts (2008:711) states that "time and space are an effect of socio-material practice" and that "space and time are not a priori, nor fixed in some universal epistemology, but are effects of particular practices and material relations". In other words, the train creates new socio-material practices that require different ways of embodiment and interaction with space. Furthermore, as Doreen Massey (2005:118) states: "as you travel you are part of the constant process of the making and braking of links ... of yourself ... of space itself". It is therefore argued that train surfing is employed by members of the train surfing subculture to escape (break away) from township life, but in a sense they are always connected or linked to this very space.

Technology has also turned the city into a ruined spectacle with citizens playing the part of actor, master or conqueror of space. Erik Swyngedouw and Maria Kaïka (2003:9) assert that technology as "discursive-ideological apparatuses have infused everyday life ... and reshaped the urbanisation process .... in deeply disturbing directions". Cities were celebrated as the hubs of progress, innovation and prosperity, but now cities have become feared spaces of degeneration and ruin. Trains and other transportation modes use "hard and soft technology that enable one to move quickly from place to place, to 'annihilate space by time'" (Swyngedouw & Kaïka 2003:13). Space is no longer of importance when one travels as quickly as possible to get from point A to B. To this extent, the city space is not always longer lived and experienced in a positive way. The only concept of importance for urbanites is time.

The author regards the train as an alienating technological device for the following reasons. Firstly, commuters are never in control of the train: they have to adhere to strict timetables enforced by the railway authority (Metrorail). Secondly, the train embeds commuters in a monotonous routine of taking the same routes to arrive at the same destinations. The author regards this rigid routine, along with commuters' superficial

interactions with nameless individuals in public space as everyday engagements that lead to the alienation of train commuters. Lastly, the author also interprets the train as a device that transports the working class living in townships to their places of employment. The working class is dependent on this inexpensive mode of transportation as their salaries do not permit them to buy cars or motorcycles. For this reason, the train is interpreted as a so-called 'capitalist' device. Because the working class and the underclass do not have enough monetary or 'buying' power they have to depend on trains as a transportation mode. As such train travel is, furthermore, interpreted as an alienating spatial practice because it is a passive act and travellers exhibit very little agency while commuting on a train. Train travellers are, thus, forced into a prescriptive 'contractuality' (to use Augé's term) with the train station, the train and their destinations. Firstly, due to their economic position, they are dependent on trains and the railway authority that enforce strict rules regarding tickets and timetables. And secondly, the experience of urban spaces and destinations is 'annihilated' by time as the train rushes across urban and peri-urban landscapes. The train does, to some extent, transport the traveller as a willing 'hostage' to whichever destination he or he chooses.

Although spaces (such as the non-place) and certain technological devices (the train) are interpreted as alienating, these can, however, be appropriated and used in different ways. Because trains and railway tracks are controlled by non-place, resistance is exhibited on these objects. As such the non-place with its extensions are transformed into a landscape "with a sense of purpose and aesthetic/experiential potential, through this radical inhabitation" (Daskalaki et. al. 2008.51). 'Radical inhabitation' is a way of 'living' a space and a new way of place-making. The theoretical non-place is transformed, by a spatial act, into what Soja (1996) calls 'third space' – a space that is "inhabited and transformed by performance and engagement" (Daskalaki et. al. 2008:61). Train surfing thus transforms the alienating space of the non-place into a transitional space, a space abound with "chance, interaction, possibility, imagination, creativity and change" (Daskalaki et. al. 2008:51). Train surfers also resist the alienating powers of the train by performing de-alienating acts on trains. As established in Chapter Two, train surfing is a ritualised performative act through which train surfers 'act' out their masculinity. Daring

train surfing the stunts performed on top of the train is regarded as a direct subversive response to the alienating spatial practice of travelling on a train. Where train travel signifies the 'annihilation' of place, train surfing is a way of place-making. The top of the train becomes a stage whereon rituals (train surfing stunts) are performed. These rituals are not only a form of place-making but also serves as a platform where train surfers can embody their masculine personas. Lastly, train commuters are seen as passive individuals who do not attempt to meaningfully engage with the spatial practice of train travel and the non-place of the train station. In contrast to this, train surfers are interpreted as active individuals who participate in a risk-taking activity to resist the alienating spatial practice of train travel.

As such, the interpretation of the train station as alienating non-place substantiates the argument that alienating space can lead to the creation of risk-taking activities such as train surfing as this particular activity takes place within non-place. Train surfing is, thus, regarded as a response to an alienating environment – the non-place has no history but contractual forces dominate and control the space – and train surfers consciously choose to resist and rewrite the spatial narrative present at the non-place. Here, risk-taking activities like train surfing should not equated to something that is merely negative as it may have liberating properties. The next section investigates train surfing as a liberating form of mobility. Train surfing is also considered a spatial practice and a new way of living or inhabiting the city.

5.4   Train surfing as spatial practice

A spatial practice, according to Lefebvre (1991:38), "is revealed through the deciphering of space". At this point, the metaphor that city space is a text that can be decoded or deciphered is applicable. Urbanites decode city space through their daily routines: walking in the streets, driving to work, and going home.[19] For example, the act of walking through a city is a way of "writing" the city and a way to "transform action into

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[19] "Everyday acts of walking, eating, going to bed" are regarded as spatial practices by De Certeau (1988:108).

legibility" (De Certeau 1988:93;97). Urbanites also make conscious and unconscious decisions regarding the different routes that they can take to work, to home or to leisure spaces. A spatial practice is thus an act, like walking or driving, through which the user (urbanite) appropriates or uses space to act out a certain narrative (i.e. I am walking to get to my work). Sarah Nuttall (2004:740) also states that "each time we move we potentially use space differently". This highlights that users of space actively engage with space to give it meaning.

De Certeau (1988) specifically deals with walking as one way of experiencing or living the city. Walking, states De Certeau (1988:97-98), is a process of

> *appropriation* of the topo-geographical system on the part of the pedestrian ... it is a spatial acting-out of the place ... and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic 'contracts' in the form of movements (emphasis in original).

A first point that makes train surfing comparable to walking as spatial practice is that train surfers also engage with the physical environment (train station, trains) and appropriate it. Secondly, 'spatial-acting' out is in line with Lefebvre's (1991:33) argument that spatial practices entail a certain "performance" by a subject, that is, train surfers 'read' the space of the train station/train and take steps to perform a certain activity (train surfing) in the specified space. It must be noted, however, that train surfing is not the socially-prescribed or acceptable 'performance' normally associated with being at a train station or being a passenger on a train, but it is a spatial performance nonetheless. Lastly, the train surfer stands or acts in a relational position amongst train commuters, train stations and railway tracks. And in this relational position the train surfer performs his train surfing stunts.

Nuttall (2004:740) emphasises another 'product' of walking the city, namely the construction of identity:

> People use cities by constructing who they are, producing a narrative of identity. They write the city without being able to read it – they do not know how their individual paths affect the city as a whole ... the city is the way that it is walked.

Train surfers also produce 'narratives of identity' through the act of train surfing (i.e. the construction of masculine identities and nicknames). They cannot predict how their

spatial practice influences the rest of the city or township, but this unique activity is a way through which they experience urban space.

As such, train surfers' bodies are unique spaces that enunciate their masculinity and their resistance to alienating spaces and spatial practices. Train surfing gives the marginalised train surfer the opportunity to act out certain narratives of belonging as well as his masculinity. Judith Butler (1998:31) states that

> 'the body' appears as a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed or as the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself.

Here the act of train surfing is interpreted as train surfers' 'instrument' through which they act out their 'appropriative will' of inscribing their bodies with new cultural meanings. Train surfers consciously refute stereotypical interpretations of 'the township boy' by participating in train surfing. This performative act imbues their bodies with new, potent meanings that are overtly masculine.

Butler (1988:519), furthermore, asserts that "gender is instituted through the stylisation of the body". In the analysed videos it becomes clear that train surfers 'style' their train surfing stunts to be more daring and dangerous than those of their rivals. The continual strive to 'out perform' one another, the names given to stunts, the formation of so-called 'macho' nicknames, and the manner in which the train surfers fearlessly perform their stunts are all ways through which they 'style' their body to exhibit masculinity. The body of the train surfer is thus a space or a text that can be read in various ways. Firstly, the train surfer's body is used in a performative act that embodies his gender and showcases his masculinity. Secondly, his body has agency. Butler (1988:521) states that the body is "a materiality that bears meaning ... and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic". The train surfer's body as a space engages with the alienating space of the train/train station/township/city in a unique manner that is ultimately subversive. Train surfing is a performance wherein the "gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space" (Butler 1988:526). This performative act is therefore interpreted as an

embodied spatial practice that not only reinforces train surfers' gender but also highlights their will to re-appropriate alienating spaces.

In addition to the preceding argument, De Certeau (1988:93) points out that, spatial activities are practiced by figures of mobility. Existing literature on cities and space mention the following mobile figures who engage with city or urban space. The first historical figure, as identified by Zygmunt Bauman and Augé (1995:90), is the pilgrim "who is focused only on his/her destination" (Nuttall 2004:740). The earliest 'theoretical' figure is the *flâneur* as described by both Charles Baudelaire and Walter Benjamin. Nuttall (2004:740) explains that the *flâneur* is a "bohemian" figure who walks and drifts through the city. He is a voyeur and gazes at all the sights the city has to offer. Nuttall (2004:740) also lists the following figures: the tourist for whom the city is a spectacle; the player "who knows the rules of various urban games"; the commuter who travels through the city to his workplace; the *sapeur* who is a "figure of spatial transition", a foreign individual who participates in "cult of appearance" and "circulates between countries"; and lastly, the vagabond or vagrant who "moves at the borders of the establishment through the practices of transgression, and who makes the city his or her victim".[20] Bauman (2000:93) calls vagrants or vagabonds the "*mobile vulgus*". This category includes "the inferior kind of people on the move, dribbling or gushing into places where only the right kind of people should have the right to be" (Bauman 2000:93). Here Bauman refers to stalkers, hawkers or people who must be kept out of public areas and security estates.

The author would like to add the train surfer to the list of mobile figures engaging in spatial practices. In order to accomplish this classification, the historical roots of black South African mobility have to be investigated. South Africa, according to Nuttall (2004:735), is a country "born out of processes of mobility, the boundaries of which have constantly been reinvented over time, through war, dislocation and dispossession". As a product of capitalism, the city's gold mines attracted thousands of immigrants and migrant labourers. It is, however, the city as authoritarian construct that had the most

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[20] Migrants and immigrants can also be included in the overarching category of 'mobile figures in the city'.

profound impact on the mobility of black residents. The city – as a product of capitalism and authoritarian rule – knew that people of colour were "a vital source of labour" but because of their race, they were "an unwelcome presence in the body-politic", states Dawson (2004:23). Therefore townships were established to force black workers to live outside the city and as a result black workers had to travel to their workplaces in the city by bus, taxi or train. Apartheid furthermore traced "marks on the [black] body and on territory": strict control was exercised over "public contexts of walking" through the invention of the pass law system (Mbembe 2004:390).

Nuttall (2004:744) states that "walking on the streets and avenues of Bulawayo has a very particular history for black Zimbabweans. A by-law drafted in 1898 prohibited [black people] from using the pavements in Bulawayo". As such, the South African pass law system had a similar effect: prescriptive laws restricted the movement of people of colour. It is, thus, ironic to read Spiro Kostof's (1992) account regarding the street as public space (quoted in Rosenthal 2000:49):

> The only legitimacy of the street is as public space. Without it, there is no city ... The street, furthermore, structures community. It puts on display the workings of the city, and supplies a backdrop for its common rituals. Because it is so, the private buildings that enclose the street are perforce endowed with a public presence.

During the apartheid era black South Africans did not experience Johannesburg's streets as places that shaped community. The act of walking was to abide by apartheid's spatial governance practices therefore rendering the act hollow instead of freedom-giving.

As a result of spatial strategies (i.e. the invention of townships and pass laws) people of colour were relegated to the rank of 'second-class citizens' who occupied marginalised positions in society. The great paradox of the authoritarian era in terms of mobility, was that people of colour were free to travel to work (to maintain the economy), but every day, agency-giving practices such as engaging with public space, travelling to friends and walking in the city were controlled, monitored and restricted. Mbembe (2004:391) agrees: "the rights of blacks to live in the city were constantly under threat, if not denied

in full, which is why most social struggles of the post-apartheid era can be read as attempts to reconquer the right to the urban".

Another element that substantiates the assertion that train surfers are mobile figures is the fact that their mobility is dependent on trains. Train surfers embody fragments of the mobility experienced by migrant workers who came to Johannesburg by train and train commuters who travel to Johannesburg for work. Although the train surfer is mobile (moving between train stations), he never finally arrives at a specific destination – he is in fact on a journey with no end except for the possibility that it may end in death.

Lastly, spatial practices also entail a material engagement with space. The *flâneur* walks the streets and for him the city is a spectacle. The *traceur*, a practitioner of *parkour*, does free running.[21] He explores buildings, parks and other city spaces to jump and run over obstacles. The skateboarder 'skates' through the city and like the *traceur*, is looking for new places to practice his craft. Derelict buildings, hand-rails and flights of stairs take on new meaning for the skateboarder who appropriates and utilises space for his own purposes. The *traceur*, skateboarder and train surfer all subvert the meaning of city space and create new narratives or as Carol Magee (2007:110) terms it, "spatial stories". Train surfing, however, moves away from the engagement with the built environment that is present in skateboarding and *parkour*. It is an extreme way of living, exploring and being in the city and in space. Train surfing is the engagement with township space, the space of the non-place (train stations, railway tracks that link the empty space between train stations) and a technological device signifying mobility (the train).

Although train surfing entails the material engagement with place and space, this spatial practice has another dimension to it. It is proposed that train surfing should be analysed as an "extreme and subversive engagement" with space (Daskalaki et. al. 2008:51).

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[21] *Parkour* or free running was invented in Paris, France during the early 1990s. Paula Wasley (2006:8) states that *parkour* is a "free-form urban sport" based on "French military training exercises" and the concept of this sport is to "get from point A to point B in the fastest, most efficient manner possible". In *parkour* buildings, fences and stairs are not seen as obstacles that the *traceur* has to overcome, but rather as opportunities for finding new paths to get from point A to point B. City space, thus, becomes a giant obstacle course or a playground.

Daskalaki et. al. (2008:51) state that because post-modern cities, like Johannesburg, function along "processes of ... domination", disempowered urbanites use new tactics to reappropriate space in order to subvert originally intended meanings of spaces, and to 'rebel' against dominant ideologies as well as the creators of urban spaces. This notion points to the power-resistance dialectic inherent to space. The statement that space is always "practiced place", highlights that space is subject to social processes, social practices and social change (De Certeau 1988:117). Space is, thus, a product of social negotiation, a construct that is socially and culturally identified, and as such its meaning can be contested. Michel Foucault (1993:135) stresses this by stating: "there always remain the possibility of resistance, disobedience, and oppositional groupings" when one is dealing with the analysis of space. Where place is understood as stable or fixed, spatial practices can transform both place and space into a construct that signifies movement and the possibility of change. And it is in the spatial realm that man seeks new ways by which he can transform himself and his environment, writes Manuel Castells (1979:115). Based on the presupposition that man appropriates space by consciously acting out spatial practices, the next section investigates train surfing as a form of resistance or de-alienation. As such, train surfing is regarded as a means through which train surfers can overcome the influences of the alienated city.

5.5   From alienation to de-alienation: resistance as agency-giving force

Karl Marx's definition of alienation, as cited by Lefebvre (2002:207), is "the transformation of man's *activities* and relations into *things* by the action of economic *fetishes*, such as money, commodities and capital" (emphasis in original).[22] Lefebvre (2002:206-207) furthermore states that "'man' is alienated, torn from his self and changed into a thing, along with his freedom". Based on Marx's and Lefebvre's interpretations, alienation is a 'force' that changes and alters people. Alienating factors can include ideologies such as capitalism and racism, social factors such as class structures, and external environmental influences. Since there is a myriad of categories

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[22] Maurice Merleau-Ponty (quoted in Crowther 1993:49) states that the "fundamental condition of human being-in-the-world is embodiment"; and if we are not embodied, we "would relapse into the status of mere things, and would be unable to sustain our embodied existence".

that classify alienated conditions, the author would like to highlight the following aspects of alienation and de-alienation based on the five propositions presented by Lefebvre.

Firstly, both alienation and de-alienation cannot be theorised as "a 'state' ... both are conceived of in movement" (Lefebvre 2002:207). Secondly, neither alienation nor de-alienation is a permanent condition; it takes the form of a dialectical movement: alienation is transformed to de-alienation and this can lead to new alienation (Lefebvre 2002:207). Lefebvre (2002:207) stresses that de-alienating activities can lead to greater alienation: "to become part of a collectivity can 'disalienate' one from solitude, but this does not preclude new alienations which may come from the collectivity itself". This is also applicable to train surfing, that is, train surfers are alienated individuals, they participate in train surfing as a de-alienating activity, but this activity further alienates them from society because their behaviour is regarded as delinquent and reckless. Thirdly, Lefebvre (2002:208) argues that the worst form of alienation is when

> the alienation itself is non-conscious (or unrecognised). Awareness of an alienation is already disalienation, but it can become changed into a yet deeper alienation (when failure, privation or frustration become fixed in the consciousness). So the option which brings one alienation to an end, by going towards a possibility, can create another mutilation and a different alienation.

The author argues that train surfers do not experience the worst form of alienation as they are consciously aware of their socio-economic circumstances: growing up in a township, having little future prospects, dealing with HIV/AIDS, and abusing drugs and alcohol (*Carte Blanche* 2008). They consciously train surf due to the alienating properties of their circumstances and the de-alienating properties of their spatial practice: "It helps me forget my problems. It makes me happy" (Train surfer 1, *Carte Blanche* 2008).[23] And as such, being aware of their circumstances and participating in a de-alienating activity, leads them to a state of de-alienation. But the dialectical movement is still evident in this case, because train surfing (de-alienating movement) leads to another form of alienation, namely fatalism: "I do not care because we are going to die" (Train surfer 1, *Carte Blanche* 2008).

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[23] Lefebvre (2002:209) refers to "alienation through escapism". The author believes that the train surfer's statement falls into this category. The train surfer recognises his circumstances (deprivations) and uses train surfing as a means to escape his situation.

Lefebvre's fourth proposition outlines various kinds of alienations. Of these, the following are applicable to train surfers. According to Lefebvre (2002:208) the proletariat's alienation is different from the alienation experienced by the bourgeoisie, that is, the working class experiences other "privations and frustrations". Soweto is mainly inhabited by the working class of which many are poor. They experience hardships such as difficult access to adequate housing and to basic services such as water, sanitation and electricity. Township residents also experience "economic alienation (by money and commodities)" (Lefebvre 2002:208). They are thus alienated from the economic sphere because they cannot afford expensive commodities. Train surfers do not surf in expensive shoes or special clothing or garments, they surf in school uniforms and school shoes (*Carte Blanche* 2008). Another form of alienation is the "alienation of social groups, which stops them from fully 'appropriating' the conditions in which they exist and keeps them *below their possibilities*" (emphasis in original, Lefebvre 2002:209). The author argues that train surfers experience social alienation as they are part of the urban underclass and they are marginalised because of their social status.

Sowetan train surfers are, furthermore, alienated due to the lack of exposure to technology (Lefebvre 2002:209). The author interprets 'technology' as any form of mechanical, telecommunications and information technology. Examples of technology include mechanical products for example cars, trains, airplanes, and space shuttles; and information/telecommunications products such as fibre optic cables, high-speed Internet connections, cell phones, computers, and laptops. The trains surfed by train surfers are old and outdated when compared to other high-speed trains in Europe. Township residents, furthermore, do not have access to the latest 'technologies' such as high-speed Internet connections and the latest computer models. Township residents (including train surfers) are thus technologically alienated as a result of the lack of technological devices, mechanisms and products available within township space. Although some of these technologies might be available in townships, they will still be unattainable for many due to the high cost of these products.

Lastly, Lefebvre (2002:214) points out that

> alienation is the result of a relation with 'otherness', and this relation makes us 'other', i.e., it changes us, tears us from our self and transforms an activity (be it conscious or not) into something else, or quite simply, into a thing.

The author interprets Lefebvre's viewpoint as man looks at himself (I am), he then compares himself to others (I am not ...) and he realises that he is different from the other 'person'. People are therefore defined by what/who they are not, that is, they are defined in relation with 'otherness'. Lefebvre (2002:215) stresses that this 'otherness' attracts us, disturbs us, makes us feel uncertain and makes us experience anguish. Perhaps, train surfers compare themselves to the mythical figures from which they derive their names.[24] They then realise that they are not as strong, masculine, or heroic as these 'icons'. By adopting these icons' persona, the train surfer "approach[s] otherness and bring[s] it closer to [him]. It is a disalienation (which can entail risks of further alienations)" (Lefebvre 2002:215).

The author, furthermore, proposes that the dialectical relationship that exists between alienation and de-alienation can be applied to the power-resistance spatial dialectic. As users of space actively choose to resist controlling or alienating spaces, it may lead to de-alienating inhabitation of space, and as a result, the users of spaces may regain some form of agency that was lost while they were still 'trapped' in alienating/controlling spatial environments. Here resistance is equated with de-alienation as the author regards both movements to produce some form of agency. Lefebvre (2002:207) states that alienation can be eradicated through "the revolutionary action of the proletariat". The revolutionary action or agency-giving force that Lefebvre refers to, also takes on different forms. To contextualise this statement, people (users of space) are interpreted as either active or passive in their engagements with space. Passive users follow spatial clues (informative, instructive or prescriptive texts) that guide them through space. They adhere to rules inscribed onto space and abide by the 'contract' (to use Augé's term) they have with the creators of spaces. Active users, on the other hand, reclaim their agency or autonomy (their independence) when they engage in de-alienating or subversive spatial practices

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[24] See Chapter Two, Section 2.3 as well as Chapter Four, Section 4.3.4 for nicknames and other references made to iconic figures in popular culture.

such as train surfing. To live in an autonomous state would imply that one is not alienated. Lewis Mumford (1964:1) states that

> all living organisms are in some degree autonomous, in that they follow a life-pattern of their own; but in man this autonomy is an essential condition for his further development. We surrender some of our autonomy when ill or crippled: but to surrender it every day on every occasion would be to turn life itself into a chronic illness.

In alienating cities urbanites can, thus, choose to be active users of space. As Mumford (1964:3) proclaims: even under authoritarian or democratic rule "some degree of autonomy, selectivity, [and] creativity remains". The author would like to briefly investigate some creative and inventive ways through which users of space can reclaim their agency that can lead to a de-alienated condition.

Guy Debord investigates people's will to reappropriate urban space. According to Debord (1968:23), "of all the affairs we participate in, with or without interest, the groping quest for a new way of life is the only thing that remains really exciting". A new way of life, is to experience space differently and to spatially engage with the city in new ways. Debord argues that *derive* is one such way to live the city differently.

Mauro Cherubini and Nicolas Nova (2004:10) define *derive* as a

> technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. It consists in walking through the city, by being drawn by attractions of the urban environments or the encounters they find there.

Debord (1955:25) states that place provokes certain sensations and that cities are divided into zones of "distinct psychic atmospheres ... the appealing or repelling character of certain places ... [but] diverse urban decors cannot be determined solely on the basis of the historical period or architectural style, much less on the basis of housing conditions". Emotions are one of the most important ways of interpreting city space and influence how one chooses new paths to map the city. As such one needs a new mode of analysis to decode city space, because city space is not just experienced by examining the historicity or architectural significance of buildings. As a result Debord (1955:23) formulated the theory of 'psychogeography' that is a "study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organised or not, on the emotions and

behaviour of individuals". Debord's followers invented "psychogeographical games" like navigating through Paris with a London map (Cherubini & Nova 2004:10). Followers were also encouraged to go on "psychological drifts" based on emotions, feelings and the 'coolness' of certain places (Cherubini & Nova 2004:16).

Debord's method to the decoding of city space is a phenomenological approach which stresses that people's spatial choices (where to walk, run, sit, play, and rest) are subjective, emotional, and influenced by their subconscious perceptions regarding the spaces they occupy. If one follows one's own path based on one's individually unique emotions, the prescriptive rules and regulations of spaces fade away and have no bearing on one's spatial choices. *Derive* is, subsequently, one spatial practice that functions along the control-resistance dialectic. The normal sequence of this dialectic follows a linear pattern: space exerts control over users, users then resist the control by performing a spatial practice, and as a result some degree of agency is instilled in the user. An inversion of power is also inherent to this dialectic: at first, space controls users but because resistance and spatial practices can be regarded as agency-giving forces, the users now control, to some extent, the way they navigate, experience and inhabit space.

Debord's theory on space did, however, evolve into a more radical approach, and in *The society of spectacle* (1968), he declares that the city is both the site of freedom and the space of tyranny and exploitation. Where Debord (1955) first regarded the city as a site of possibility, a place where the mere act of wandering was enough to appropriate space, again the city is now a construct that exploits and a place where more forceful power is exerted over subjects. The author views Debord's radical theoretical shift as a result of the formation of global or post-modern cities. These cities exert stricter control and surveillance over urbanites, and the emphasis is on post-industrial modes of production, as well as, the establishment of a consumer society. In this context, post-capitalist society does not only create economic and social alienation, but also alienation through 'advanced' technology, as technology is not only used to keep urbanites under surveillance, but technology can make some aspects of human labour redundant. This deeply rooted fear of technology is voiced by Mumford (1964:8):

> Under the pretext of saving labour, the ultimate end of this technics is to displace life, or rather, to transfer the attributes of life to the machine and the mechanical collective, allowing only so much of the organism to remain as may be controlled and manipulated.

Mumford's statement underlines the fact that capitalism, through the use of technology, strips humans of their agency. In a mass production, mass consumer society, a person is seen as just a cog in a machine, a passive instrument that produces alienated labour. In order to escape society's alienating socio-economic structures, Debord (1968) sates that one must liberate oneself in order to change and transform society. Debord's call to action led to the formation of the Situationalists who orchestrated situations that would disrupt hegemony, that is, the 'ordinary' and 'normal'. Peter Marshall (1992:553) states that some of the disruptive, agency-giving situations that Debord espouses are "vandalism, wildcat strikes and sabotage as a way of destroying the manufactured spectacle and commodity economy".[25] The move from *derive* to the establishment of the Situationists proves that Soja's social-spatial dialectic is accurate, because as spaces change (as a result of social practices that lead to a heightening in alienation), so do the spatial practices of people (activities that lead to a state of de-alienation).

In Johannesburg's realm of the everyday life a new spatial practice, namely train surfing, can be found that is reminiscent of Debord's prerequisites to the disruption of the status quo. Here the focus returns to the suggestion that marginalised (alienated) people seek agency by performing in new, inventive ways. Richard Hil and Judith Bessant (1999:41) state that agency is the term

> used by many modern sociologists to stress that 'society' does not manipulate people like puppets, but that as people we have the capacity to be self aware, to know what we are doing and to be able to give reasonable accounts of why we have done what we did.

Following the power-resistance dialectic, train surfers are regarded as alienated individuals due to economic and social alienation, as previously established. The second part of this dialectic takes form when people become conscious of their alienation and

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[25] Mumford (1964:8) argues in a similar vain and proposes that people must engage in activities that "permit human alternatives, human interventions, and human destinations for entirely different purposes from those of the system itself".

actively seek ways to overcome the condition. Hil and Bessant (1999:43) state that young people react to alienating factors by engaging "in hostile conflicts [with] the agents of social control (police, transport inspectors, security guards)". Resistance furthermore "develops in highly specific and different ways and usually in response to specific modes of domination" (Tait quoted in Hil & Bessant 1999:45). Stuart Hall's research during the 1970s and 1980s at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) highlights that young people offer physical and symbolic resistance to established society through rituals, practices, clothing and music. The author regards train surfing as a practice of resistance because train surfers challenge the accepted notions of safety, what activities constitute sports or even games, and how one should navigate urban space. Another tactic of resistance, according to Hil and Bessant (1999:46), is "methods of avoidance". Young people consciously circumvent "repressive and regulatory practices" by do not coming into contact with security officials (Hil & Bessant 1999:46). Train surfers also practice 'methods of avoidance' by choosing the 'right' train station, that is, a train station with few security officials, and by selecting appropriate times to train surf, for example on Fridays or when there is a security guard strike (*Carte Blanche* 2008).

Lastly, it can be argued that train surfers are conscious of their alienated condition and engage in a spatial resistance tactic (train surfing) to overcome this condition, and through train surfing they reclaim agency.[26] Pierre Bourdieu (1985:242) states that the

> symbolic power of agents, understood as a power of making people see – *theorein* – and believe, of producing and imposing the legitimate or legal classification, depends ... on the position they occupy in the space (and in the classifications that are potentially inscribed in it).

As such the passive (alienated) train surfer is symbolically transformed into an active agent that experiences a new way of living and engaging with both township and city space. The train surfer reacts to his multi-facetted alienation (economic, social, technological and spatial) by subverting the dominant narratives inscribed onto township space and train stations. The practitioner of train surfing is able to decode township space and the space of the non-place and write new spatial narratives onto these spaces. The act

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[26] Hil and Bessant (1999:47) state that "skateboarding, dirt bike riding, wake board riding, sand boarding, train-surfing, music and dance sessions, rave parties, etc. are just some of the forms of resistance to the spatial restrictions imposed upon young people".

of train surfing is therefore interpreted as a spatial practice that helps alienated individuals move from a state of estrangement to a state of (fleeting) freedom and agency.

5.6   Conclusion

This chapter situated train surfing as risk-taking behaviour that is practised by marginalised individuals. Risk-taking was analysed as a practice that adds 'meaning' to young people's lives. The perceived 'gains' associated with risk-taking behaviours, including the construction of a positive identity, gaining status, acquiring adoration and forming connotations to the heroic, were applied to train surfers. This application proved that train surfing is a risky rite of passage used in urban environments by marginalised individuals who desperately seek acceptance, escapism, and status. Another cause for the participation in risk-taking activities, namely psychological motivation, was also discussed. Thereafter, it was proposed that although various psychological motivations and perceived gains can influence adolescents to participate in high risk activities, one must also consider that alienating place(s) and space(s) can also generate circumstances that are conductive to risk-taking behaviour.

As a prelude to describing the specific place(s) and space(s) where train surfing occurs, theories regarding place and space were discussed. Soja's social-spatial dialectic and Lefebvre's three-part ontology of space were discussed to frame both place and space as social, cultural and political constructs that can be decoded. Thereafter, the focus shifted to the three spaces wherein train surfing occurs, namely Johannesburg, Soweto and township train stations. Key concepts such as the historicity of space, space as a text, and perceptions of space were used to investigate Johannesburg and Soweto as socially produced spaces and Soweto's train stations were analysed as non-place following Augé's definition of non-places. It was noted that all three constructs – city space, township space and train stations – can be read as alienating spaces because dominant political, cultural and social ideologies have shaped and controlled these spaces. Although theses spaces might be alienating, they are used by people, and as such, the

possibility that users of space might subvert the original meanings of such spaces is always present.

One way in which individuals challenge the dominant narratives inscribed onto space is by performing spatial activities and new spatial practices. De Certeau and Lefebvre's descriptions of spatial practices were included alongside examples of spatial practices, such as walking. Figures of mobility who engage in spatial practices, such as the pilgrim, the *flâneur*, the commuter, and the *sapeur* were introduced and the train surfer was added to this list. It was argued that because of their mobility and material engagement with space, these figures experience city space differently.

Lastly, it was proposed that train surfing is not only a material engagement with space, but rather an extreme and subversive interaction with place(s) and space(s). As such the author proposed that train surfers experience alienation (economic, social, technical, being classified as 'other'), but because they are aware of their alienation, they actively resist these alienating factors by participating in a performative act that affords them the opportunity to rewrite urban space. It was also argued that spatial practices operate along a power-resistance dialectic and that extreme spatial practices produce agency-giving experiences. Here Debord's *derive* and Situationalist approaches were included and train surfing was theorised as a resistance tactic that not only disrupts the status quo, but leads to a de-alienated condition.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

6.1   Summary of chapters

Chapter One introduced the main aims of the study, namely to establish that train surfing is a visual spectacle that occurs within the context of post-authoritarian Johannesburg; that train surfers are part of the urban underclass and are therefore considered marginalised individuals; and that train surfing is an extreme engagement with urban space that can result in a de-alienating experience. It also sketched the theoretical framework of the study as informed by visual culture, cultural studies and visual anthropology. Furthermore, the methodological framework of the study was delineated as both a literature study and a critical reading of train surfing as a spatial practice.

Chapter Two used a hermeneutical approach to decode seven train surfing videos. The analysis established that there was a clear distinction between train surfing in the North (Europe) and train surfing in the South (South Africa and Brazil). It was noted that train surfing in the North is a solitary activity and train surfers do not perform as many stunts when compared to train surfing in the South where surfers surf in groups and perform extremely dangerous stunts. Secondly, train surfing was framed as a spectacle by discussing the similarities between train surfing and rites of passage (initiation rites). Turner's (1984) essay proved useful in establishing train surfing as a ritual or rite through which marginalised train surfers move from being socially invisible to being socially visible. By drawing on Meyerhoff's (1984) research, it was furthermore established that the viewer, onlooker or audience plays an essential role in producing an unforgettable spectacle. Without spectators there would be no spectacle and train surfers therefore engage with their audience by making eye contact and by reacting to their cheers of adulation. Lastly, it was concluded that train surfing is a specific form of storytelling. Implicit and explicit visual and verbal references in the videos confirmed that train surfing narrates societal or individual problems or crises, and as such, the stories that are 'surfed' are tales of fatalism experienced by marginalised individuals. It was also

suggested that creating a narrative of one's existence ('this is who I am: I am a fearless train surfer') enables alienated individuals to exert control over one aspect of their lives, and this makes this form of expression agency-giving.

Chapter Three explored the spatial context within which train surfing occurs. In this chapter the historical and present-day interpretations of Johannesburg were traced, and Johannesburg's spatial history was discussed as being both an authoritarian and post-authoritarian construct. The authoritarian period (1886-1994) was characterised by the influence three political regimes (Paul Kruger government, British (colonial) rule, National Party (apartheid) regime) had on the city's space. These regimes created an exclusionary city based on class and racial divisions. The city was fragmented even more during the National Party's rule as a result of large scale urbanisation that, in turn, led to the expansion of Johannesburg's peripheral townships and squatter settlements. The tracing of the city's history revealed that several generations of black people were subjugated to spatial control practices that had created dysfunctional citizenship structures. The analysis of post-authoritarian Johannesburg (1994-present) revealed that the city still excludes urbanites, not based on race, but along socio-economic lines. It was revealed that although the ANC's ideology of equality, freedom and a better future attempts to rewrite city space through the erection of memorials and museums that commemorate the past, Johannesburg still stays trapped (to some extent) in its apartheid spatial form. This statement was substantiated by investigating the current conditions in the city's surrounding townships.

Thereafter, township space as a product of both capitalism and urbanisation was read as a construct that is both marginal and hybrid. The marginality of townships was established by using Shields' (1991) definition of marginal space. Research conducted by Huey and Kemple (2007), Nutall and Mbembe (2005) as well as Schmid (1995) corroborated that South African townships are indeed marginal spaces due to their peripheral location, they are inhabited by the underclass and they are formed by processes of capitalism and urbanisation. It was also argued that marginalisation has a psychological impact on township residents and as a result they have fatalistic mindsets (Gulick 1989). Although

the discussion on the marginality of townships framed these spaces as alienating, township space can also be read as hybrid space. It was determined that Soweto is situated in a spatial realm that contains a fusion of elements such as different 'housing' or building styles, it has no clear architectural heritage that binds the space together and different ethnicities inhabit this space. These traits and the township's in-between location (in-between rural farmland and the city) make the space 'other space' or a space of hybridity (Ellapen 2007). Following Mitchell's (2008) argument, it was argued that hybrid spaces offer township residents an 'arena' where they can resist dominant ideologies. As such, the paradoxical nature of township space was uncovered: although marginal space subordinates residents, the same space – as a hybrid construct – in turn, offers them opportunities to resist the powers that be. This 'feature' of hybrid space was explored by reading Soweto as a site of struggle. It traced the resistance tactics used by township residents during the apartheid era and it was argued that train surfing is a present day tactic of resistance used by train surfers to 'rebel' against oppressive spaces, dominant ideologies and socio-economic conditions.

Chapter Four framed the socio-economic underpinnings to train surfing by exploring Johannesburg's urban underclass. It was established that train surfers are part of this sub-category based on their marginal status and economical position. Thereafter, the material living conditions (housing conditions and unemployment, failing family structures, the legacy of gang culture as well as drug and alcohol abuse) were explored. It was argued that because train surfers are exposed to harsh living conditions they develop fatalistic mindsets. This assertion was substantiated by tracing Soweto's lost generation (1970-1990) who were rendered unemployable as a result of the high school drop-out rate experienced during the political struggle against apartheid, as well as the current 'lost' generation that is influenced by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, high unemployment rates and poor living conditions. The notion of fatalism was further explored by integrating theoretical explanations on fatalism by Whelan (1996) and Cummings (1977) with first-person accounts of train surfers. It was determined that train surfers have fatalistic mindsets as a result of the specific class (underclass) to which they belong, and because they deem township life as 'boring', they have bleak future prospects, and they feel that

their material living conditions (circumstances) are out of their control. To substantiate the argument that material living conditions and social pathologies contribute to the creation of fatalistic practices (such as train surfing), comparative socio-economic factors present in Brazil and South Africa were interrogated. It was ascertained that when factors such as migration, poverty, unemployment and high levels of crime are present, these factors can contribute to the establishment of risk-taking activities such as train surfing.

Chapter Five furthered the argument presented in Chapter Four by exploring the psychological motivations behind risk-taking activities. It was determined that train surfers, who are marginalised, participate in this activity to add meaning to their lives, they want to test the limits imposed on them by society, and they want to exert control over their body-politic – the only perceived area (space) they deem controllable. High risk activities also entail the participants being afforded with perceived 'gains'. The 'gains' of train surfing were detailed as: attaining status (through initiation), it is a "fun" and "cool" activity, it proves that train surfers are 'real' men, and it constructs overtly masculine identities (Hesselink 2008:123). In addition to Hesselink's listed gains, the four main purposes of train surfing were established as: escapism, the expression of one's identity, to rebel against social injustices (harsh living conditions such as alienating space), and to be integrated with society (acceptance into a gang).

Moreover, it was proposed that although socio-economic conditions and psychological motivations can usher adolescents into participating in risk-taking activities, the place(s) and space(s) that individuals inhabit could also be regarded as factors that can produce risk-taking behaviour. As such the specific place(s) and space(s), namely Johannesburg, Soweto and township train stations, inhabited by train surfers were discussed. It was established that these three spaces could be interpreted as alienating spaces due to the exclusionary nature of present day Johannesburg as a historical, social and political construct that still marginalises individuals based on nationality, class and socio-economic position. It was restated that township space, like Soweto, is both marginal and hybrid. Townships can, furthermore, be interpreted as zones of "transition" due to on-going processes of urbanisation, class mobility and the influx of migrants that render the

space unstable (Huey & Kemple 2007:2307). Township train stations were interpreted as non-places based on Augé's (1995) definition of non-place. It was argued that township train stations are devoid of any cultural referents and that township residents function within prescribed forms of 'contractuality' (being submissive and passive) when they enter the space of the train station. These two elements, thus, contribute to the alienating character of the non-place. Train surfing that takes place at train stations can, however, not be classified as a passive, submissive action normally associated with the non-place. It is an extreme and subversive engagement with the space of the non-place.

To determine why subversive spatial engagements take place, the notion of spatial practices was explored by drawing on Lefebvre (1991) and De Certeau (1988). It was noted that a spatial practice is an act that allows an individual to appropriate space to act out a certain narrative or an act that allows the individual to use space differently. As such, train surfing was discussed as a spatial performance enacted by train surfers to express their identity and to exert control over their surroundings. It was argued that because space is always subject to social negotiation, its meaning and ways to navigate space can be contested. Foucault's (1993) argument that there is always a possibility of "resistance" was explored in detail to establish that alienating spaces as well as alienated 'movements' can be contested, reinterpreted and remapped through spatial practices.

Lefebvre's (2002) proposed types of alienation namely economic, social, technological and alienation through 'otherness' were applied to train surfers. By applying these four 'categories' of alienation, it was deduced that train surfers are alienated individuals who occupy alienating spaces (Johannesburg, Soweto and township train stations). Following the control-resistance dialectic inherent to space, train surfers consciously acknowledge the controlling ideologies and choose to resist the dominant spatial 'contracts' inscribed onto the spaces they occupy. Debord's (1968) tactics of resistance, among others *derive*, were briefly surveyed and it was established that train surfing is similar to *derive* as it also disrupts the status quo. Lastly, it was argued that alienated individuals seek agency by performing in new, inventive ways to regain agency that is lost when one occupies and interacts with alienating space. Train surfing was described as one such way in which

alienated train surfers regain agency and exert control over the spaces they occupy. As such, train surfing was read as an instrument of resistance: train surfers challenge accepted notions of safety and which activities can be classified as sports/game, and how one should navigate urban space. And lastly, it was argued that by employing this spatial strategy, train surfers are able to move from an alienated to a de-alienated condition, thus substantiating the presupposition that train surfing is an agency-giving act.

6.2   Contribution of study

This study investigated a visual phenomenon, namely train surfing, that is theoretically under-researched. As such, this dissertation is, to date, the only in-depth discussion on train surfing that has explored the visuality of train surfing, situated it as a spatial practice and explored the de-alienating properties of this extreme activity.

Available literature on train surfing revealed that this practice is perceived by the media (especially the South African print media) as only a delinquent activity practised by daredevils. The author deemed this interpretation as overly simplistic and one dimensional. This assumption was refuted through examining the socio-economic conditions wherein this practice takes place as well as the psychological motivations of adolescents who participate in high risk activities. This analysis revealed that train surfing is a multi-dimensional activity that spatially narrates train surfers' crisis and dire socio-economic circumstances.

It also aimed to prove that train surfing is an extreme engagement with urban space and the process of train surfing empowers surfers to re-appropriate and remap urban space in such a way that leads to a state of de-alienation. Established theories on space and place were integrated in such a way throughout this dissertation to prove that extreme spatial practices such as train surfing are influenced by alienating spaces. As such the marginal and hybrid qualities of spaces (township space, non-place) were investigated and it was found that the control-resistance dialectic is present when train surfers engage with urban

space. Lastly, the lack of available literature on train surfing proved that new spatial practices are an under-theorised area of visual culture.

The contribution to the Visual Cultural Studies field is therefore three-fold: firstly, the study draws attention to train surfing as not only an interesting visual phenomenon but as a spatial practice; secondly by employing cross-disciplinary research this seemingly 'un-researchable' topic is given new dimensions through the exploration of the socio-economical factors that influence train surfers; and lastly, the interpretations of city and township space are executed in such a way to establish that alienating place(s) and space(s) contribute to the formation of new, subversive practices that seek to disrupt the status quo.

6.3   Limitations of study

The greatest limitation to this study was the lack of available theoretical literature on train surfing. The only academic account of train surfing (Hesselink 2008) viewed train surfing through a legal lens and newspaper articles predominantly describe surfing deaths and frame the activity as dangerous and illegal. As a result of this limitation, the author had to propose different lenses through which train surfing could be investigated. These lenses included train surfing as visual spectacle; the spatial milieu in which train surfing occurs; the social class (underclass) and socio-economic factors to which train surfers are exposed; and train surfing as a spatial practice that seeks to overcome alienating conditions.

The limited length of this study also constrained the author to only focus on socio-economic factors in South Africa (in addition to a brief correlation with Brazil) that were deemed as impetuses to the formation of risk-taking activities. The author, therefore, notes that there might be other factors that influence or contribute to this spatial practice in the Northern hemisphere.

The study has, furthermore, not sought to relate the re-appropriation of space to other spatial practices. As the emphasis of the dissertation falls on train surfing, other spatial practices such as *parkour*, skateboarding and extreme sports were not adequately investigated.

Lastly, as cross-disciplinary research was employed to investigate train surfing one tier of this dissertation was not investigated in-depth. During the visual analysis of videos the author could have employed a closer semiotic reading, but because the emphasis was on train surfing as spectacle, the construction of identity and the interaction with city and township space, certain signifiers and codes were not analysed in detail. It must be noted that although a closer reading could have yielded interesting data, the focus nevertheless remained on the three areas outlined above.

6.4   Suggestions for further research

As an extension of this study the socio-economic, spatial conditions and psychological motivations for train surfing in the North (Europe) could be investigated. Such an investigation might result in the establishment of comparative factors that can crystallise and corroborate the findings presented in this dissertation. It is, furthermore, suggested that this dissertation's critical reading of train surfing as spatial practice could be used to analyse other extreme spatial practices such as *parkour*. It would also be illuminating to investigate whether urbanisation, capitalism and the influence of political regimes as experienced in other African cities have contributed to the formation of extreme spatial practices.

6.5   Concluding remarks

Erik Swyngedouw and Maria Kaïka (2003:5) express the core of this dissertation namely that cities are ambivalent, paradoxical, multi-facetted entities:

> cities are differentiated spaces that are expressive of heterogeneity, diversity of activity, excitement and pleasure ... arenas for the pursuit of un-oppressive

activities and desires, but also ones replete with systematic power, danger, oppression, domination and exclusion.

This statement furthermore points to the notion that urbanites actively seek and pursue the right to be urban by engaging with spaces. These two premises namely, city space as ambivalent and the (control-resistance) relationship between people and their environment, formed the basis of this dissertation. The exploration of post-authoritarian Johannesburg revealed that the city still excludes, oppresses and dominates the underclass and fragmented spaces are created for different social classes. However, it was also concluded that although certain spaces might be interpreted as marginal, the concept of hybridity in township space, gives individuals an arena where they can resist forces of oppression and domination. As such it is argued that when individuals choose to actively engage with space in a subversive manner, new spatial practices are formed that can lead alienated individuals to a de-alienating condition. Train surfing is, therefore, read as a radical engagement with space and place and through this spatial practice a degree of autonomy is reclaimed by train surfers.

To this extent, this dissertation loosely followed a hermeneutical approach to interpret the train surfing phenomenon.[1] It was established that train surfers appropriate place(s) and space(s) to give new meaning to space and to express various spatial narratives. Train surfing is proposed as a tactic that enables train surfers to live and master the city. As such train surfing is conceived as a bridge between alienating spaces and the creation of re-appropriated spaces that are de-alienated, and as a spatial (and perhaps a ritual) practice that makes the passage from alienated self to the self that has regained some form of agency possible.

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[1] The hermeneutical framework used by the author entailed interpreting visual evidence as well as newspaper articles of train surfing as texts. The interpretative process also entailed analysing verbal and non-verbal forms of communication (as exhibited in the texts) through the employment of semiotics.

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