

Expressing liminality through a reflective practice account of *Dismotief*

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Dismotief (dis-motif) is an interdisciplinary production that explores masculinity, identity and language. The collaborative exhibition, held in the Potchefstroom City Hall in 2012, encompassed poetry, visual art and musical performances to investigate alternative expressions of Afrikaner masculinity as part of the on-going postcolonial discourse of whiteness in Africa. The curatorial design of the exhibition included actual and psychological margins in order to present the audience with a liminal space. This article presents a post-project reflection of *Dismotief* as framed by a practice-based research model in order to investigate the interrelated influence that both a research-led and practice-led approach had and continues to have on the production process. In this regard the focus is placed on the curatorial process and eventual design of the exhibition *Dismotief* as practice-led research. Simultaneously the research-led process of theorising the exhibition as a liminal space is investigated. We argue that this reflection facilitates the interrelated relationship between research and practice as a continuous progression. The methodological documentation of the project *Dismotief* is chronologically divided into three phases namely a pre-production reflection, a production or descriptive reflection and a post-production reflection.

Key words: *Dismotief*, liminality, practice-led research, research-led practice

Uitdrukkings van liminaliteit deur 'n praktykgerigte weerspieëling van *Dismotief*

Dismotief is 'n interdisiplinêre produksie wat manlikheid, identiteit en taal as wegspringpunt gebruik. Die groepsuitstalling is gehou in die Potchefstroomse stadsaal in 2012 en het onderskeidelik gebruik gemaak van poësie, klassieke komposisie en visuele kuns om alternatiewe uitdrukkings van Afrikaner-manlikheid as deel van die voortdurende postkoloniale gesprek oor witheid in Afrika te ondersoek. Fisiese en psigologiese marginale ruimtes is deur die kuratoriale ontwerp van die uitstalling bewerkstellig. Dit is gedoen om die gehoor te konfronteer met 'n liminale ruimte. Hierdie artikel bied 'n post-projek- weerspieëling van *Dismotief*, soos gekonseptualiseer deur 'n praktykgebaseerde navorsingsmodel, om die interafhanklike invloede te ondersoek van beide 'n navorsings- en praktykgeleide benadering gedurende en na die produksieproses. In hierdie verband word aandag geskenk aan die kuratoriale proses en uiteindelijke ontwerp van die uitstalling *Dismotief* as praktykgeleide navorsing. Terselfdertyd word die teoretisering van die uitstalling - as 'n liminale ruimte - ondersoek as navorsingsgeleide praktyk. Ons argumenteer dat hierdie weerspieëling die voortdurende interafhanklike verhouding tussen navorsing en praktyk fasiliteer. Die metodologiese dokumentering van die projek *Dismotief* is chronologies verdeel in drie fases naamlik 'n pre-produksie weerspieëling, 'n produksie of beskrywende weerspieëling sowel as 'n post-produksie weerspieëling.

Slutelwoorde: *Dismotief*, liminaliteit, praktykgeleide navorsing, navorsingsgeleide praktyk

What came first? The research or the artefact? In reality there would be no research without an artefact and no artefact without the research. Creative practitioners that work in an academic research field are often caught up in this conundrum. Smith and Dean (2009: 7) argues that practice-led research represents both the artefact as research, as well as the insights, documented or theorized research opportunities as well as outcomes that have resulted from the making of such an artefact. They further promote the idea that academic research does not only serve to inform or reflect on the making process, but can also lead to creative outputs in its own right. They view practice-led research and research-led

practice as part of an “interwoven and interactive cyclic web” that is akin to what Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 21-25) call a rhizome: “it has no beginning or an end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo” (cf. Smith & Dean 2009: 21). This article investigates this interrelated, circular progression between research-led practice and practice-led research during the pre-production process leading to the actual staging of the collaborative exhibition *Dismotief* (2012) as well as the post-production reflection, as documented by this article.

In order to facilitate this discussion, a brief overview description of *Dismotief* is given. *Dismotief* investigates alternative expressions of the Afrikaans language, *Afrikanerskap* and identity by assimilating contemporary South-African poetry, visual art and musical performances by white Afrikaans speaking men. Poetry by Tertius Kapp (born 1979), Loftus Marais (born 1982) and Wyn Roux (born 1982) was collaboratively interpreted by composers Pieter Bezuidenhout (born 1987), Braam du Toit (born 1981) and Franco Prinsloo (born 1987, who also acted as director for the musical production) and artists Richardt Strydom (born 1971, curator), Steven Bosch (born 1978, co-curator) and Abri de Swardt (born 1988). The final production was held in the Potchefstroom City Hall during the 2012 Aardklop National Arts Festival and consisted of photographic and audio-visual artworks, typographic representations of poems and sound recordings of the musical compositions. Additionally a live musical performance was scheduled each afternoon for the last three days of the festival.

Dismotief (dis-motif) uses the notion of motif as metaphorical and theoretical departure – aimed to oppose and question the hereditary hegemonic motifs of a white, Afrikaans speaking, South-African man (cf. Strydom & Bosch 2012). The prefix dis-, from Latin meaning “apart” or “asunder”, points to a further distancing and rejection of so called mainstream conceptions of these cultural motifs. The eventual design of the exhibition was accordingly conceptualised around marginal spaces and borders or what the postcolonial theorist Bhabha (1994: 6, 7) calls the liminal. The limen, originally conceptualised from an anthropological perspective in the context of rituals by Van Gennep (1960[1908]) and later Turner (1969; 1974 and 1982), is characterised as a passageway or threshold - a ceremonial state of existence between cultural borders or margins (Van der Merwe & Viljoen 2007: 10). According to Bhabha (1994: 7, 117) this space represents the point between departing and arriving, a space beyond colonial dependence where a new independent cultural identity can subsequently come into being:

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such act does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present. The ‘past-present’ becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living Bhabha (1994: 7).

In tandem with the above mentioned theoretical angle, the exhibition and performance venue, Potchefstroom City Hall, also included actual cordoned-off areas which can theoretically be interpreted as liminal spaces. Concurrently, during the process of conceptualising and curating the *Dismotief* production, there was a bi-directional reciprocal relationship between research and creative practice (cf. Smith & Dean 2009: 1) that incorporated both practice-led research and research-led practice processes. The focus of this article is thus on the curatorial practice of *Dismotief* and of the exhibition as liminal space and event. In this article we will set off with a theoretical positioning of liminality emphasising Bhabha’s (1994) postcolonial conceptualisation of the construct as theoretical foundation for the curatorial process and design of the production. The reflection of the production *Dismotief* is then documented according to according to a practice-led research model. This model is premised on a three part process consisting of pre-production reflection, production or descriptive reflection and post-production reflection.

The concluding summary of the main arguments in this article represents a collaborative post-production reflection of this process. Although the exhibition *Dismotief* provides pertinent further research possibilities into topics such as whiteness and Afrikaner masculinity, this article however focuses on liminality and liminal spaces as a simultaneous product of the curatorial or practice-led process as influenced by a research-led approach.

Theorising the postcolonial liminal

Bhabha's (1994: 7) description above of intermediate cultural locations as a place of cultural conversion, emphasises the spatial importance of cultural borders and the need to go beyond these borders. In *The Location of Culture* he (1994), himself a migrant originally from Bombay, addresses migrant identities, diaspora and hybridity – those living on imaginative or physical margins (cf. McLoed 2010: 251-252). For Bhabha (1994: 1, 7) these so called *in-between* spaces become ambivalent thresholds - connecting and separating - places where one is faced with the “moment of transit” when “newness” is confronted. He (1994: 1) stresses that the importance of the transitional “beyond” or the “in-between” does not lie in leaving the past behind or arriving in the future, but rather represents the moment they cross: the transitional liminal.

Liminal, derived from the Latin noun *limen* or *liminis* means threshold or lintel. In accordance the word *transitional* originated from the Latin term *transire* which implies to cross over (the prefix *translated* accentuating the *across* and the *beyond*), (cf. Oxford dictionary of word origins 2010). Both terms were used by anthropologist Van Gennep (1960[1908]) to describe, in the context of rituals, the phases of the rite of passage. Van Gennep (1960[1908]: 21) divided the ceremonial into three phases namely: the pre-liminal or the separation phase, the liminal or in-between phase and the post-liminal or the reincorporation phase. The liminal phase represents what van Gennep described as a phase of marginalisation where a temporary, reflective awareness exists between the preliminary state (pre-liminal) and the state of completion (post-liminal). The anthropologist Turner (1969, 1977 and 1982) would develop van Gennep's conceptualisation further by focusing on the liminal experience as a transitional and marginal “location”. Turner (1969: 95) defines the liminal as an ambiguous, culturally invisible zone that manifests when restrictions of impending social structures arise. In this dualistic, in-between border zone, one is betwixt by being neither here nor there:

Here I would like to repeat the ‘Orphic’ level of ritual, which transcends both structure and antistructure, the oppositions...become irrelevant, a new arbitrariness appears in the relation between signifier and signified – things cease to signify other things, for everything is, the Saussurean significative dualism yields to a basal non-dualism where signifier and signified dissolve into indiscriminable existence (Turner, 1992: 157).

The symbolic Turnerian notion of liminality as an unpredictable zone that exceeds meta-structures/narratives would later be used and developed by Bhabha (1994), from a postcolonial perspective, to describe hybrid identities: “the slippage of signification that is celebrated in the articulation of difference” (Bhabha, 1994: 235). According to Bhabha (1994: 37) this hybrid zone constructs a productive but fluctuating “third-space of enunciation” where identity and agency are ever-changing. He (1994: 1, 4, 7) postulates that the liminal denounces binaries. Past and present, inside and outside, difference and similarity are denied and conventional ideas regarding identity are dislocated and can possibly be deconstructed (cf. Bhabha, 1994: 1, 7). Colonial articulations of Self/other, master/slave, native/foreigner is condemned and remodelled within the liminal. This outlook is accentuated by Bhabha's (1994: 1, 34) emphasis, in accordance with the postcolonial theorist Spivak (cf. *Can the Subaltern speak?*, 1997[1988]),

on identity as an always volatile *discursive* product. Discursive is used here by both Spivak and Bhabha from a post-structuralist viewpoint and broadly refers to the construction of human consciousness and selfhood as being an effect and product of external, rather than internal, discourses of power (McLeod 2010: 218). Subsequently one's identity is always in flux by constantly being resituated and inherently reconstructed as positions of power shift. From this stance Bhabha (1994: 2, 34-35, 179) argues that identity, as part of complex cultural systems, is not formed by inherited identity structures such as colonialism but rather constructed by individual and collective identity as it is performed now. This argument does not imply that received knowledge from the (colonial) past is dismissed, but rather that it can be renegotiated. Hence identity in the limen or third-space can be re-enunciated and re-inscribed by means of performance (Bhabha 1994: 2, 35):

Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively. The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation... (Bhabha 1994: 2).

For Bhabha (1994: 2) "the importance of social articulation of difference" becomes a reflective recognition that empowers the subject to "restage the past". By denying a so called original or inherited identity, the boundaries are disrupted and the focus shifts to the invention of a new tradition with new boundaries. Accordingly Bhabha (1994: 37-38) declares the liminal or Third Space of enunciations a pre-condition to cultural change. The liminal should therefore be embraced and celebrated as transitional sites of intervention where identity re-evaluation can occur (Bhabha, 1994: 7). For Bhabha (1994: 37-38) this space may possibly mark the beginning of a global culture that is based on the voicing of hybridity: the transformation of polarised diversity into multiculturalism.

The postcolonial theorist Young (1996: 249), although recognising Bhabha's viewpoint, warns against the over accentuation of hybridity that may paradoxically eradicate cultural diversity in the name of sameness. Bhabha (1994: 4-5, 28, 112) however, used the construct *hybridity* to criticise colonial power hierarchies by deconstructing the hegemonic belief that cultures and their subjectivities are "pure" entities which can easily be separated. In contrast Bhabha (1994: 4, 113) suggests, in accordance with a post-structural framework, that marginalised cultural subjectivities in fact consist of different influences, foundations or geographical places: as plural hybrids. These difference and borders become important for they mark the threshold or liminal space where the linear structure of identity is disrupted.

The linear structure of identity is disrupted, in accordance with Ricoeur (1991: 435), when the structure of an identity narrative is disrupted. This brings forth an experience of an identity rupture which forces the subject to revisit and confront their identity. The production *Dismotief* invites and challenges the audience to confront and re-evaluate their own identity narrative. This is done by taking the liminal (as an abstract theoretical construct) into account during the pre-production process and ultimately utilising the venue to symbolically construct a liminal space during the production itself. The following section discusses *Dismotief's* creative process according to the practice-based research model as devised by Combrink and Marley (2009: 192-196) consisting of pre-production reflection, production or descriptive reflection and post-production reflection. Concluding remarks in this article are presented as constituent of a collaborative post-production reflection of this process.

Pre-production reflection: contextualising the motif

The idea for *Dismotief* came about via an informal discussion between Franco Prinsloo, Steven Bosch and Richardt Strydom. Prinsloo expressed the desire to showcase some of his classical music compositions in a more contemporary context that did not have to adhere to conventions of classical music performance practices. After this discussion Prinsloo, Bosch and Strydom decided to have a more formal meeting to exchange ideas and discuss a possible collaboration, and to determine what each of them could contribute to such a production. Prinsloo had staged and taken part in a number of musical and theatre productions – many of which included his own musical compositions (cf. SA Composers 2014). Bosch is an emerging artist who boasts participation in numerous national peer reviewed art competitions and exhibitions including the Absa L’Atelier and Sasol New Signatures art competitions (cf. ABSA 2010: 46-47; SASOL 2008: 10; SASOL 2009: 16; SASOL 2012: 20-21). Strydom had taken part in numerous national as well as international exhibitions and received a number of art awards, including Absa L’Atelier (then Volkskas Bank Atelier) and Sasol New Signatures merit awards in 1997 and was the overall winner of Sasol New Signatures 2008 (cf. Volkskas Bank 1997: 6; SASOL 2008: 6, 28; Buys 2008: 30). In addition to knowledge in artistic practice, Strydom also has curatorial experience (cf. Dippenaar & Strydom 2007: 1). Both Bosch and Strydom were at the time also working in an academic context and had experience in project management. From this discussion of artists’ practice, the notion of identity emerged as common themes. Bosch and Strydom both address aspects of Afrikaner history and identity in their oeuvres and Prinsloo had been involved in predominantly Afrikaans productions and produced a number of Afrikaans musical arrangements. Strydom’s prior research in the field of postcolonial theory, Afrikaner identity, whiteness and masculinity (cf. Strydom 2009: 1-204; Strydom 2011: viii) helped to conceptualise and frame the project reflection in context of current South African identity discourse (cf. Strydom 2009: 1-204; Strydom 2011: viii).

It was decided to use Afrikaans poetry as a common point of departure for artworks and musical scores, which conceptually tied in with the initiators’ common Afrikaner identities, but also, it was felt, with the textual context of contemporary creative practices (cf. Tate Papers 2012). The notion of a textual interpretation of contemporary creative practices is also reflected in the name *Dismotief* itself. A motif (in Afrikaans, *motief*) is a recurring element that may form part of the authoring strategies in various creative disciplines, including poetry, music and the visual arts. In literature a motif refers to a recurring element that has a symbolic significance in the narrative. In visual art a motif may be a single or repeating visual element (cf. Childs & Fowler 2006: 146, 239; Cuddon & Preston 1998: 522). In music a motif is the smallest structural unit of notes that can convey a stylistic theme in a composition. A leading motif in music that specifically refers to a particular idea, person or place is called a leitmotif. A leitmotif is clearly defined in order to retain its identity and character, even when modified on sequential appearances (The Oxford dictionary of music, 2006). As mentioned earlier the notion of motif is used in *Dismotief* as metaphorical departure – the production aimed to oppose and to question the hegemonic leitmotifs regarding Afrikaans, *Afrikanerskap* and identity. These leitmotifs, inherited from a white colonial past, become what psychology and literature calls *idéés fixes*: a recurring idea that dominates one’s mind for a prolonged period of time, a haunting fixation (cf. Cuddon & Preston 1998: 409-410). *Dismotief* concurrently emphasising the prefix *dis-*, from Latin meaning “apart” or “asunder” (cf. Oxford dictionary of word origins, 2010), points to the marginalising and denunciation of mainstream conceptions of these cultural motifs: conceptually moving into a liminal space. In accordance with Bhabha’s (1994) conceptualisation of postcolonial liminality as introduced above, the limen or the threshold becomes a necessity in

order to disrupt the colonial leitmotif. When one is presented - physically or symbolically - with a liminal space, the linear structure of identity is confronted and can therefore be renegotiated by means of re-performance (cf. Ricoeur 1991: 435; Bhabha 1994: 2, 35).

In the process of discussing and unpacking *dis-motief* as central theme and structure of the planned production, a number of candidates emerged that was thought would make exciting contributions through their respective creative discourses and practices. The final selection of authors focused on poets who, in the opinion of the initiators, shared critique of leitmotifs of Afrikaner masculinity in their writing. Loftus Marais, 2010 winner of the South African Literary Award for Poetry for his debut anthology *Staan in die algemeen nader aan vensters* (Pieterse 2013: 6), for example, often makes use of queer motifs in his work. Tertius Kapp's award winning (cf. Artslink 2013) *Rooiland* explores, among other themes, the violent othering of whiteness. Kapp (2014) states that he was particularly interested in exploring aspects of personal versus the collective violence through memory and ritual. Emerging critical poet Wyn Roux completed the trio of authors.

Strydom and Bosch compiled a short list of visual artists whose work engaged with notions of masculinity as well as cultural tradition and history. After discussion and deliberation, Abri de Swardt was selected and invited to take part in the project. A young emerging talent, de Swart was fast making a name for himself as both artist and art writer dealing with notions of masculine performativity. He received a *Sasol New Signatures* merit award in 2009 and an *Absa L'Atelier* merit award in 2010 (cf. SASOL 2009: 10; ABSA 2010: 33, 38). Prinsloo compiled a list of composers and after a similar process of discussion and deliberation, Pieter Bezuidenhout and Braam du Toit were invited to participate in the production. Bezuidenhout specialises in choral and instrumental music. In 2012 his choral composition *Stardance* was selected as festival piece for the European Choral Association's European Academy of Choral Conductors event in Graz, Austria (cf. European Choral Association 2012). Du Toit, who has become known for his collaborative theatre work, has received numerous accolades and awards, including the 2010 Best Music Award at the Monaco Film Festival for his soundtrack for Regardt van den Bergh's feature film *Tornado and the Kalahari Horse Whisperer* (cf. Du Toit 2014).

The idea was to pair each poet with an artist and a composer to form three creative interdisciplinary groups. Various groupings were considered by looking at the creative affinities between poets, composers and artists. After much debate and consideration, the following trios were decided upon: Kapp's poems would be interpreted by Bosch and Bezuidenhout; Marais was to collaborate with Strydom and Du Toit, while Prinsloo and de Swart were to respond to Roux's work. At this point it was also decided that Bosch, Prinsloo and Strydom, as project initiators, would each co-ordinate the creative process of their respective groups. Prinsloo would also act as director for the music production and performances while Strydom and Bosch would together co-ordinate and co-curate the exhibition and liaise with the press.

With the theme, structure and creative teams in place, a formal project proposal was drafted. The proposal was submitted to the Aardklop National Arts Festival programme committee and was also used to apply for funding from various institutions. After the production was accepted for the 2012 Aardklop programme, the poets were sent an abridged version of the project proposal that highlighted the project outline, theme, objectives and deadlines. In response, each poet was commissioned to write a maximum of three poems, after which the completed pieces were made available to the composers and artists for interpretation.

The project focussed on subjective experiences as a way to counter hegemonic perspectives. Poets were free to interpret the theme in a personal manner. Due to financial considerations, composers were limited to an ensemble consisting of a string quartet, piano, alto saxophone, percussion and a male tenor for vocals. No directives were set with regards to artists' interpretation of the theme. The available exhibition space and access points to the space did however restrict either the maximum size or placement of artworks.

Descriptive reflection: The production *Dismotief* as liminal space

The choice of venue had to take into account the positioning and discourse of white Afrikaans masculinity in postcolonial and post-apartheid social and cultural contexts and thus contributing to the decoding of the production. Whiteness (and race for that matter) has and continues to influence the structuring of social, educational, geographical, political and economic relationships globally (cf. Dyer 2002: 1-3). It retains an ironic hegemonic status, systematically privileged and inherited by its (colonial) past. Concurrently, as Lopez (2005: 6) suggests, whiteness is struggling to become part of a critical postcolonial discourse:

...there are white subjects, cultural groups, who think of themselves as postcolonial. The point is that there remains in the early twenty-first century a postcolonial whiteness struggling to come into being, or rather a number of post-empire, post mastery whiteness attempting to examine themselves in relation to histories of oppression and hegemony of their others in order to learn the difficult, never mastered skill that Heidegger used to call *Mitsein*: Being with (López 2005: 6).

López (2005: 6) concedes that a “post-mastery whiteness”, as described above, is seldom witnessed in an emergent postcolonial world. Although conflicting opinions surround the discourse of whiteness it is still unquestionably burdened with its colonial past and challenged by the contradictory present. Whiteness viewed from a South African democratic backdrop is no different (cf. Rossouw 2011: 4; Strydom 2011: viii). Since the advent of European colonialism, the discourse of whiteness has had a sustained impact on social, political and economic relationships in South Africa (cf. West & Schmidt 2010: 9-10; Green *et al.* 2007: 389,405). The discourse of whiteness has also found expression in spatial organisation (cf. Ashcroft, 2001: 15; Carruthers & Arnold 2000: 22; Van Eeden 2004: 28, 32), therefore it was important that apart from whiteness the notions of space and place were considered integral to the experience and reading of *Dismotief*.

Bosch and Strydom's involvement with the Potchefstroom Heritage Society informed the selection of the appropriate venue for the production. Bosch, in his position as chair of the Potchefstroom Heritage Society (2010-2011), had acquired valuable knowledge regarding the history and historical significance of national heritage sites in Potchefstroom. A number of sites were considered including the Commanding Officers House and the Old Fire Station. After site visits it was decided that the Potchefstroom City Hall presented the best setting and context for *Dismotief*. The building was designed in an Edwardian style and was inaugurated in 1909. Together with the Krugersdorp City Hall, it is the oldest city hall complex in what was then the Transvaal. It was declared a national monument in 1993 (Stigting Simon van der Stel 1992: 71). The building forms part of a civic complex consisting of municipal offices, a tourist information centre and the Carnegie Library building. It is situated on Walter Sisulu Avenue (formerly Church Street) in an area adjacent the old central business district and opposite the Dutch Reformed Church, bordering Church Square. The church was inaugurated in 1866 and the building declared a national monument in 1965 (cf. Stigting Simon van der Stel 1992: 21).

In a conversation with the building caretaker it became clear that the building had largely fallen into disuse, apart from occasional workers' meetings in the side hall (figure 1). Buildings such as the Potchefstroom City Hall can theoretically be associated with a liminal space as ambivalent thresholds between the past and present (cf. Bhabha 1994:1-7). The Potchefstroom City Hall simultaneously represents the colonial empire that constructed it and its falling apart. The building, once situated in the centre of Potchefstroom's economy, is now a marginalised heritage site. City Hall as venue for the production *Dismotief* can simultaneously not be removed from the social and spatial context of a national arts festival such as Aardklop. Van Heerden (2011: 54-55) uses Turner's (1992: 147) expanded views of Van Gennep's (1960[1908]) theories on liminality to argue that arts festivals represent constructed liminal events. According to Turner (1992: 147) liminality calls established social orders into question by eroding the mundane as taken for granted. In this process the social order is "mocked, reversed, criticised, or ignored". Van Heerden (2011: 54-55) goes on to argue that manifestations of liminality are socially and spatially constructed; factors that contribute to characterising the Aardklop National Arts Festival in a suspended or liminal state. The City Hall as an official Aardklop venue becomes an extension of such a liminal state. The renewed, but shortly lived, public interest in City Hall during for example Aardklop, enforces the building as a place of transit that connects and separates the past and present as a hybrid zone.



Figure 1
Workers' meeting in progress, side hall of Potchefstroom City Hall, 2012 (photo: courtesy of artists).

With the first site visit it became apparent that public access to the second storey gallery was restricted due to an on-going restoration process. The stage area was also cordoned off due to safety concerns after brickwork had tumbled down onto it. The main hall, which can seat about 500 people, still boasts its original dark walnut wood wall panelling (cf. Stigting Simon van der

Stel 1992: 71), which precluded the conventional hanging of artworks in this space (figure 2). None of the side spaces leading off from the main hall (an entrance hall in front, a side hall to the right (figure 1) and a bar area to the left) has picture rails installed and the alteration or adding of fixtures is prohibited, which also prevented the hanging of artworks on the walls.

These restrictions offered the opportunity to use the space in a non-conventional way and strongly influenced the curatorial approach. Together with the cordoned-off areas it became an integral part of the production, as it dictated the use of marginal spaces in the building for both the exhibition and performance components. In accordance with Bhabha (1994: 7) the use of these marginal spaces in the building breaks the continuum of time, declaring these spaces as newfound liminal spaces that “interrupt the performance of the present”. The use of space now became an integral part in the decoding of *Dismotief*. It was decided that the main hall would remain empty to draw attention to the now unused and indolent civic space. Regarding the performance aspect, for example, the initial idea was to invert conventional audience and performance relationship conventions by placing the audience on the stage and the performers in the second storey gallery, leaving the main public seating space of the hall empty and void. Safety concerns, however, determined that the stage had to remain cordoned off from public access, and thus scuppered this idea. The only solution was to place the audience in the conventional seating space with the performers remaining in the gallery, forcing viewers to look up at the performance at a steep angle (figures 3-4). In order to retain the notion of a fainéant civic space, seating was stacked in front of the men’s ablutions in the side entrance hall (figure 5) and audience members were requested to fetch and return their own chairs with each performance.

The inutile stage became a visual and conceptual focus point in an already empty fainéant civic space. Since the wood panelling and lack of picture rails made conventional hanging of two dimensional works in the main spaces prohibitive, it was decided to investigate the storage facility under the stage as a possible exhibition space (figure 7). This solution proved to be very advantageous, as it provided three distinct but interconnected spaces. At the time the area was filled with furniture, old election boxes and a variety of other objects. As both practical and aesthetic decision, all furniture and impedimenta removed from the storage facility were placed behind the makeshift barrier cordoning off the stage. At close inspection, the haphazardly stacked objects were still visible through the netting of the barricade, thus drawing attention to the now unavailing space (figures 6, 8).

In the final curation of the exhibition, the artworks occupied two spaces leading off the main hall. The bulk of the three artists’ work was housed in the storage space under the stage (figures 9-11). This space is difficult to access with a steep set of stairs leading through a low doorway (figure 7). The ceiling, in effect the underside of the stage, has low support beams, which makes walking upright difficult for the average height man. The poems, which were typeset, were placed on the floor of the side hall together with an installation by Strydom (figure 12). No clear demarcation separated exhibition areas from surrounding spaces. Access to peripheral spaces, such as the kitchen area to the back of the side hall, was left open allowing viewers to explore this space (figure 13). Exit doors leading to an empty bar facility and a small disused and overgrown inner courtyard leading off on the opposite side of the main hall, were also left open (figure 14). This was a deliberate curatorial strategy to encourage the viewer to experience the art as part of the greater socio-historical fabric of the building and its current day context.



Figure 2
View of the stage from the gallery, Potchefstroom City Hall, 2012 (photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 3
View of the gallery from main hall ground floor, Potchefstroom City Hall, 2012
(photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 4
View of recital from the gallery, Potchefstroom City Hall, 2012 (photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 5
View of seating stacked in front of the men's ablutions in the side entrance hall, Potchefstroom City Hall, 2012 (photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 6
View of under-stage storage space entrance from main hall, Potchefstroom City Hall, 2012
(photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 7
View from under-stage storage space looking towards the main entrance of main hall,
Potchefstroom City Hall, prior to *Dismotief* exhibition 2012 (photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 8

Installation view: stage area from behind barricade, Potchefstroom City Hall, prior to *Dismotief* exhibition 2012 (photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 9

Installation view of under stage area with artworks by Abri de Swardt and Richardt Strydom, Potchefstroom City Hall (photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 10
Installation view of under stage area with artworks by Richardt Strydom, Potchefstroom City Hall
(photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 11
Installation view of under stage area with artworks by de Swardt and Bosch,
Potchefstroom City Hall (photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 12
Installation view of side hall area with typeset poems and installation by Strydom,
Potchefstroom City Hall (photo: courtesy of artists).



Figure 16
Exhibition view: entrance to kitchen area, Potchefstroom City Hall, 2012 (photo: courtesy of
artists).



Figure 17

Exhibition view: exit to courtyard area, Potchefstroom City Hall, 2012 (photo: courtesy of artists).

Research meets practice: A post-production conclusion

This article set out to reflect on the interrelated influence that both a research-led and practice-led approach had on the curatorial process and eventual design of the production *Dismotief*. To illustrate this we specifically focused on the curatorial approach that focused on the liminal and accordingly incorporated both a practice-led and a research-led approach.

This was done by firstly contextualising the postcolonial construct liminality focussing mainly on Bhabha's (1994) perspectives. The limen, as used by Bhabha (1994) to theoretically position the liminal, refers to imaginative or physical margins - in-between spaces. The liminal becomes an ambivalent threshold where pre-constructed and inherited colonial identities can be renegotiated and a new hybrid identity can be enunciated. The renegotiation of identity and the need to go beyond the borders set by the past is emphasised by performing and subsequently re-creating a new self:

Once again, it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduce creative invention into the existence. And one last time, there is a return to the performance of identity as iteration, the re-creation of the self... (Bhabha 1994: 9).

The production *Dismotief* symbolically and physically constructed a liminal space in order to invite audiences to confront the past and present, inherently disrupting the linear narrative of identity. As a result a post-project reflection of the production process was presented according to practice-lead research. The conclusion can be made that the initiators of the project *Dismotief* consciously and subconsciously took the liminal as an abstract concept into consideration during

both the pre-production and production phases. This was led in some cases by a theoretical influence such as using dis-motif as metaphorical theme during the pre-production process and in other cases by the creative practice itself such as the physical restrictions in the Potchefstroom City Hall. As the post-production reflection shows, both the practice-and the research-led approaches were ultimately influenced by one another and therefore never occurred in isolation but rather in what Smith and Dean (2009: 21) call an “interwoven and interactive cyclic web”.

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