

Title: “We want to see something different (but not *too* different)”:
spatial politics and the *Pink Loerie Mardi Gras* in Knysna.

Last name: Sonnekus

First name: Theo

Middle initial: -

Username: -

Title: Mr

Suffix: -

Affiliation: University of Pretoria
(Department of Visual Arts)

Address: 28 13th Street
Menlo Park

City: Pretoria

Province: Gauteng

Postal code: 0081

Country: South Africa

Telephone: 076 042 0348

2nd Telephone: 012 424 5159

Fax: -

Email: theo@icads.co.za

Biography: Theo Sonnekus holds a MA Visual Studies (with distinction) from the University of Pretoria. His research interests are centred on queer visual culture and the intersections of race, class, gender and sexual orientation that permeate this diverse socially constructed landscape. He has delivered papers and published investigative articles on queer spaces, such as De Waterkant in Cape Town, and the South African gay men's lifestyle magazine *Gay Pages*.

“We want to see something different (but not *too* different)”: spatial politics and the *Pink Loerie Mardi Gras* in Knysna.

Abstract:

This article highlights the role of sexual orientation in the social transmutation of space, thereby illustrating how certain landscapes, generally characterised by heteronormativity, are queered by cultural phenomena such as the *Pink Loerie Mardi Gras (PLMG)* in Knysna. It is, however, not the intent of this article to describe the processes of producing queer space in a 'celebratory' tone only, but also to investigate the manner in which hierarchies of race, class, gender and especially sexual orientation are sometimes re-asserted in relation to such spatial practices. The power-laden binaries initially disrupted by the queering of space can, in fact, revert when the *PLMG* is employed as a mechanism that attempts to control, discipline or even normalise queer bodies. It seems that capitalist role-players (such as corporate sponsors and other stakeholders in the tourism industry) seek to manage the *PLMG* in terms of 'how much' space it occupies, who is represented and therefore included or excluded from this space. This leads one to critique the supposed 'Otherness' of the *PLMG*, because if it is influenced by prejudiced ideologies of consumerism and cosmopolitanism that ultimately operate in favour of heteronormativity and what it considers to be 'different enough', then to what extent can the festival legitimately or freely call itself 'queer'?

Keywords: Consumerism; cosmopolitanism; cultural assimilation; globalisation; heteronormativity; homonormativity; identity politics; queer space; spatial politics and power; the *Pink Loerie Mardi Gras*; tourism.

Introduction

Most days the fountains flanking the entrance to Knysna’s waterfront run clear, but once a year the *Pink Loerie Mardi Gras* (hereafter referred to as the *PLMG*) announces itself, and fortifies its presence, by bubbling, bright magenta-coloured water. The fountains are but one of the many sites where a distinctly ‘pink’ infiltration of space is noticeable during this three-day long festival, which apparently celebrates all things queer¹. A number of shop fronts sport dramatic pink feathers, rainbow-hued flags² are almost ubiquitous and queer bodies, of course, abound in the streets, restaurants and nightclubs of this town in the Western Cape of South Africa (1). The supposition that spaces can be subverted, negotiated and transformed (if only temporarily) by the social subjects that move in and through them, suggests that inflections of race, gender, class and sexual orientation play an important role in determining exactly how space is culturally produced and re-produced (Hubbard, Kitchin and Valentine 2004, 68).



1 Queer ‘invaders’ take to Knysna’s Main Street during the 9th Annual *PLMG* Street Parade, 2009 (Photograph by the author).

This article highlights the role of sexual orientation in the social transmutation of space as a means of illustrating how certain landscapes, generally characterised by heteronormativity, are queered by cultural phenomena such as the *PLMG* and the ‘Other’ personae that accompany them. Other than dominantly queer spaces such as De Waterkant in Cape Town (the so-called *Gay Village*), Knysna does not particularly have the distinction of being ‘always already’ queer, yet its supposed ‘heterocentricity’ is challenged and even subdued by queerness during the *PLMG* (Sonnekus 2007, 43). In other words, this article explores the spectacle of the *PLMG*’s parade and other queer performances, as well as the visual signifiers that accompany them, as catalysts for change, which destabilise the binaries of public/private, straight/queer and dominant/marginal that propagate a heterosexual prerogative to the spaces of Knysna in the absence of queer intervention (Johnston 1997, 29).

It is not, however, the intent of this article to describe the processes of producing queer space and transgressing heteronormativity in a ‘celebratory’ tone only, but also to investigate the manner in which hierarchies of race, class, gender and especially sexual orientation are sometimes re-asserted in relation to spatial practices (Butz and Ripmeester 1999, [sp]; Puar 2002, 935). The power-laden binaries initially disrupted by the queering of space can, in fact, revert when the *PLMG* is employed as a vehicle or mechanism that attempts to control, discipline or even normalise queer bodies (Shields 1991, 38). It seems that capitalist role-players (such as corporate sponsors and other stakeholders in the tourism industry) seek to manage the *PLMG* in terms of ‘how much’ space it occupies, who is represented and therefore included or excluded from these spaces (Bell and Binnie 2004, 1810). This leads one to critique the supposed ‘Otherness’ of the *PLMG*, because if it is influenced by ideologies of consumerism and cosmopolitanism that ultimately operate in favour of heteronormativity and what it considers to be ‘different enough’, then to what extent can the festival legitimately or freely call itself ‘queer’?

Making space for ‘Others’: conflicts across the queer/heteronormative divide; or, ‘changing/but staying the same’³

It is commonplace to conceive of contemporary human society as positioning heteronormative and queer cultures as opposing constructs that manifest their

respective hegemony and marginality at many levels. Space, in terms of being a socio-cultural invention, is therefore not exempt from the power struggles that exist between normatively heterosexual and 'queer' constituencies (Shields 1991, 7). As with inflections such as race or class and the manner in which spaces have shifted from 'white' to 'black' neighbourhoods or have become gentrified and economically prominent, sexual orientation also plays an important role in determining the social character of space (Visser 2000a, 128; Visser 2000b, 172; Hughes 1997, 3). If one considers that heteronormativity extends its power to physical, public spaces and therefore seeks to propagate that such spaces are 'inherently heterosexual', then the desire to take action and re-negotiate or re-construct space to cater to queerness can be expected (Pritchard, Morgan and Sedgely 1998, 273; Johnston 1997, 29; Brickell 2000, 163).

Instances of spaces being 'queered' are characteristic of many Western cultures: so-called gay 'ghettos', 'enclaves' and 'villages' have, for example, been established in major cities such as Sydney, Manchester and Cape Town, to name but a few (Kirby and Hay 1997, 295; Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 40; Sonnekus, 2007, 43). The means by which queer spaces become manifest are also ostensibly universal and usually depend on a core gay population, the presence of homocentric nightclubs, bars, guesthouses and other institutions, as well as the imbueing of these landscapes with homoerotic imagery and symbols of queer culture, unity and pride, such as Rainbow Flags (2) (Visser 2000b, 177; Sonnekus 2007, 44-46). In other words, the spaces themselves become embodiments of queer identity and thereby offer gay communities landscapes, which are supposedly not stifled by heteronormativity, that they can call their 'own' (Sonnekus 2007, 44).



2 Harry B's, Knysna, 2009 (Photograph by the author).

Knysna is not, however, unequivocally marked by the presence of homosexuality in the same way that De Waterkant and other gay urban 'clusters' present themselves as *bona fide* queer spaces. Whereas established queer landscapes seemingly allow very little deviation from homocentric ideals, the *PLMG* represents a process of queer restructuring that is marked by the spatial, as well as the temporal. Events such as the *PLMG* can be thus be read as a public deconstructive spatial tactics (Johnston 2001, 190), which actively queer space and "even if *momentary*, present an ever-shifting ground on which power and constraint is exercised" [emphasis added] (Shields 1991, 53-54). Yet, the manner in which power is re-allocated *during* the *PLMG* can be interpreted at two levels; the one more vexing to this investigation than the other.

Firstly, the presence of queer bodies, imagery and symbolism that accompanies the festival ostensibly succeeds in stifling the day-to-day heteronormativity of Knysna by giving expression to previously suppressed sexual identities, thereby reinvigorating queerness while simultaneously relegating heterosexuality to a disadvantageous position (Valentine and Skelton 2003, 855; Kirby and Hay 1997, 299; Hubbard et al. 2004, 68; Johnston 1997, 30). One can argue that the queer domination induced by the

PLMG dissipates as soon as the space it temporarily occupied is emptied of everything that has presented an affront to heteronormativity. Knysna becomes 'normal' again and straight, mainstream culture returns to the seat of power from which it rules over space. Yet, one must also consider that these fluctuations of power are not necessarily triggered only by the advent and disbandment of the *PLMG*.

The second and more critical discourse of the spatial politics that are symptomatic of the *PLMG* does not conceive of heteronormativity as 'losing' and 're-acquiring' power as the festival ends and begins, but rather seeks to determine how present the ideological influences of heteronormative culture are 'in-between'. The initial 'shock' to Knysna's spatial system is short-lived when taking into account that the festival has the potential to become exactly that which heteronormativity employs to recuperate and re-arrange the dualisms of self/other, public/private and dominant/subordinate that are structured in its favour; whether in the absence *or* presence of so-called 'queer infiltration' (Pritchard et al. 1998, 280; Johnston 2001, 193; Valdes 2002, 977; Bell and Binnie 2004, 1810). It seems that as soon as queer culture gains some gravity and becomes 'visible', it also disappears *within* the immenseness of heteronormativity by being assimilated (selectively, and on heterosexualised terms) (Namaste 1994, 224; Rushbrook 2002, 194).

Simply stating that *heteronormative* hegemony exploits a *queer* spatial practice in order to fortify itself, however, presents an unexplored paradox if one does not also disclose the ways in which this cultural assimilation takes place. For the purposes of this article, the conflicting rationales relating to the *PLMG* (which reside in heteronormative versus queer camps) reveal how overtly homocentric ideals set this process of spatialisation in motion, only to be usurped by the cultural forces that are most threatened by their presumed 'triumphs'. These diverse ideological stances that buttress the *PLMG* are discussed firstly with regard to queers' agendas of claiming space, and then with specific reference to the manner in which heteronormative intervention seeks to control exactly which queers are 'allowed' to occupy which spaces (Pritchard et al. 1998, 274).

'A space of our own': queer politics, tourism-based motivations and the PLMG

The social visibility and representation of queers, whether in political, economic, media-generated or spatial spheres, is vital to queer culture, because it creates a *visually* unified group, bound together by shared histories, practices and political sentiments (Freitas, Kaiser and Hammidi 1996, 89; Cover 2004, 81; Brickell 2000, 168). The ubiquitous mantra of 1990s queer politics, 'We're here, we're queer, get used to it', is indicative of the manner in which "privileging visibility has become a tactic of late twentieth-century identity politics, in which participants often symbolise their demands for social justice by celebrating visual signifiers of difference that have historically targeted them for discrimination" (3) (Levina, Waldo and Fitzgerald 2000, 739; Fraser 1999, 114). Spatial strategies such as the *PLMG* can be conceived of as cultural phenomena that make previously private, 'closeted' queer bodies and identities public, thereby not only disrupting heteronormativity, but also creating new, 're-arranged' spaces that supposedly promise liberation (Johnston 1997, 30).



3 A float advocating for queer rights and cultural tolerance during the *PLMG* Street Parade, 2009 (Photograph by the author).

Yet, one must also take into account that the *PLMG* operates within the realm of tourism and therefore incites queer participation for a number of reasons that are also closely tied to establishing and maintaining, or simply giving uninhibited expression to, queer identity (Sonnekus 2007, 50). Engaging with the so-called ‘push/pull’ dichotomy, or the moving away from prosaic spaces, while simultaneously moving toward spaces of novelty, excitement and leisure, reveals incentives regarding the *PLMG* that are characteristically queer and in “addition to motivations that are common among tourists in general” (Clift and Forrest 1999, 617-618). The ‘mundane’ and often stifling qualities of everyday spaces, such as ‘home’ or ‘work’, are seemingly more vexing for queers, because the “strength of the ‘naturalness’ of heterosexual hegemony [is so ubiquitous] that most people are oblivious to the way it operates as a process of power relation in most spaces”, yet queers perceive and experience it every day (Kirby and Hay 1997, 296).

The *PLMG* can be viewed as a hiatus from the structures of heteronormativity and is closely tied to the notion that ‘escapism’ is akin to tourism, since the festival “embodies the refusal to acknowledge the authority of those official institutions which ... seek to exert and extend” their hegemony (Lachmann 1989, 124). In the process of ‘painting Knysna pink’, the *PLMG* effectively creates a liminal space that, unlike the spaces travelled *from*, apparently holds the promise of radical and endless possibilities (Johnston 2001, 185; Sonnekus 2007, 52). One essentially deals with the creation of a ‘utopian myth’ when discussing the queering of space that accompanies this festival (Lachmann 1989, 125; Sonnekus 2007, 51): Temporarily reversing the patterns of socio-spatial status by shifting heterosexuality to the ‘background’, therefore offers queers participating in the *PLMG* ‘unlimited’ opportunities relating to ego-enhancement, self-realisation, social interaction with ‘people like them’, fantasy and sexual encounters, to name but a few (Hughes 1997, 5; Clift and Forrest 1999, 616; Mackie 1998, [sp]; Brickell 2000, 169; Sonnekus 2007, 50).

In other words, the *PLMG*’s ‘queer agenda’ not only emphasises the importance of thrusting queers into public, thereby making them visible, unified and politically viable, but also seeks to promote a utopian landscape that facilitates the unbridled celebration of ‘Otherness’.⁴ Yet, although this article does not seek to completely detract from the buoyancy of such practices (which, at first, succeed in subverting

“prevailing [spatial] institutions and their hierarchy”), one cannot ignore that competing heteronormative rationales seemingly impact on this brief ‘alternative’ space to such a degree that it “ultimately leaves everything as it was before” (Lachmann 1989, 125). Heteronormative motivations for ‘tolerating’ the *PLMG* are consequently exposed as attenuating the power of queer spatial intervention; re-inscribing the spatial hegemony of heterosexuality; re-establishing inequities between ‘straight’ and ‘gay’; and creating imbalances *within* the queer community.

(Selectively) selling the queer experience: cosmopolitanism, ‘queerness’, and the regenerative power of heteronormativity

Several articles featured on *Mamba Online*, a South African queer ‘lifestyle’, news and entertainment website, that appeared in the days leading up to the *PLMG* 2009 (30 April – 3 May) detail the outcries of a number of conservative Knysna residents and religious organisations that would rather have seen the festival not happen at all (“*Pink Loerie* survey questioned”, “Knysna backtracks on survey”, “Knysna backs down”, “Anti-gay voter drive revealed”): In anticipation of the eighth *PLMG* in 2008, a petition opposing the festival was presented to Knysna’s mayor, while a survey aimed at determining residents’ attitudes toward the festival was being prepared by the town’s municipality in 2009, but it never came to fruition after claims of its apparent prejudices were voiced by the queer community. What is, however, of central concern to this article is that some of the questions that originally appeared in the survey that were reiterated on *Mamba Online*, seemingly reveal some of heterocentricity’s issues with ‘unacceptable’ expressions of queerness, which it attempts to curb by distorting the *PLMG* to only facilitate that which is not too far removed from the ideals of heteronormativity.

Some of the withdrawn survey’s options were connected to potential objections and, for example, related to the ‘behaviour’, ‘costumes’ and ‘nudity’ of some of the *PLMG*’s participants. One can argue that in articulating the possible virtues associated with the *PLMG*, certain ‘differences’ are more vexing to heteronormativity than others (Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 43). In view of this, the repercussions of being selectively homophobic ultimately foster a sense of ‘homonormativity’ in the heterosexual imaginary in which “certain queer identities have become almost

pathologised” or, at least, marginalised to a greater degree than ‘normal’ queerness (Bell and Binnie 2004, 1811). External pressures from heterocentric role-players involved in the *PLMG*, whether in personal or capitalist guises, therefore “draw symbolic boundaries between the ‘invited’ and the ‘not invited’”, which have shifted from referring to ‘queer’ and ‘straight’ to ‘queer and straight’ and ‘the queer *unwanted*’ respectively (Jeong and Santos 2004, 641; Bell and Binnie 2004, 1810).

In view of this, the *PLMG*’s queering of space is not exempt from the notion that a “newly defined social [or spatial] regime may prove every bit as oppressive as what it replaces”, because extrication from one point of a power structure (heteronormativity, in this case) may leave other oppressions in its wake (Butz and Ripmeester 1999, [sp]). Highlighting only one axis of difference, namely sexual orientation, in discussions surrounding so-called ‘sexualised’ power struggles over space, often effaces disparities between race, class and gender, while these constructs are exactly those which new forms of spatial marginalisation are based on (Puar 2002, 936; Rushbrook 2002, 184): When it is profit and not necessarily tolerance that is at stake, “the perpetuation of ... male privilege, class privilege and/or white privilege within sexual minority contexts [such as the *PLMG*]” becomes important in maintaining the festival’s appeal as a tourist attraction, but simultaneously brings into serious question whether it still offers true queer liberation (Valdes 2002, 977).

The official website of the *PLMG*, for example, states that the festival “was an idea born in Knysna, by Knysnarians, to promote Knysna as a destination and to stimulate the town’s economy in May, a month also referred to [in tourism jargon] as ‘the suicide month’” (“About Us”, 2009). As subjects *and* objects of urban entrepreneurialism, queers possess ‘allure’, based on their perceived particularities, that has the potential to stimulate tourism and its consumerist effects (Bell and Binnie 2004, 1089; Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 40). Cosmopolitanism, or the accumulation of worldliness and cultural capital, permeates the *PLMG* and is “lived through the [queer] bodies involved, because the cultural context of “queerness” surrounds and arguably inhabits the [participants], but to some extent also extends to the ... watching tourists” some of who are presumably ‘straight’ (Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 53; Johnston 2001, 181, 189). Tourism therefore not only manifests as an ‘escape’ (for queer subjects), but also represents a search for authentic experiences of ‘Otherness’

or ‘something different’ (queer objects) (Gotham 2002, 1736; Johnston 2001, 181-185; Rushbrook 2002, 185).

Yet, the ‘straight tourist gaze’ enforces certain prerequisites regarding what it sees, since less assimilable qualities of queerness are presumably relegated to invisibility (Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 52; Bell and Binnie 2004, 1816; Jeong and Santos 2004, 645). Not only is it important to explore who consumes whom at the *PLMG*, as this inevitably suggests a voyeuristic power relation of ‘seeing’ and ‘being seen’, but one must also be attentive to the notion that the act of gazing upon cultural ‘others’ is never neutral and always subjective (Bell and Binnie 2004, 1809; Pritchard and Morgan 2000, 900-901).

When inflected upon by heteronormativity, cosmopolitan agendas ultimately replace ‘real’ authenticity with ‘simulated’ (and therefore biased) authenticity in order to create an acceptable version of queerness for the heterosexual imaginary, which titillates, but does not ‘offend’ or ‘threaten’ (Gotham 2002, 1738; Gotham 2005, 311; Rushbrook 2002, 196). This simulacrum is nowhere as present as in the realm of visual representation, since the primary publicity image generated for the *PLMG*, which appears ubiquitously across online and print advertisements, brochures, festival programmes, flyers and posters, for example, features an embodiment of the so-called ‘good homosexual’, who is male, attractive and white (Jeong and Santos 2004, 645; Smith 1994, 64; Puar 2002, 943).

Finding images of black gay men or lesbians that appear with the same *frequency* is unlikely, illustrating that in order to maintain the ‘trendiness’ or ‘chic’ of queer culture it must be homogenised or streamlined (mainstreamed?) to facilitate fetishisation via tourism and cosmopolitanism (Tucker 2008, 5; Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 57). Limiting the straight gaze’s contact with black, female or sexually ‘deviant’ queers (such as individuals who prescribe to sadomasochistic and ‘leather’ subcultures within the queer constituency) serves to reinscribe the supremacy of whiteness, patriarchy and propriety, and heteronormative ideology therefore benefits from having some of its ‘norms’ reiterated, despite having to make space for homosexuality. This illustrates the manner in which heteronormativity ‘recuperates’ within the spatial dynamics of the *PLMG* and hierarchically re-structures queer

culture in order to maintain and perpetuate its already established cultural privileges, whether they appear in ‘straight’ or queer guises (Ingraham 1994:204).

The cosmopolitan notion that queerness plays an important role in the production and subsequent consumption of tourist spaces reveals that the *PLMG* is mobilised by market-based incentives, since these media images are employed to obscure the prejudiced nature of contemporary capitalism (Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 40; Gotham 2002, 1737). Accordingly, another level at which heteronormativity re-empowers itself relates to the manner in which “white gay capital follows the path of white heterosexual capital” (Puar 2002, 937).

In South Africa, a country fraught with past and present racial tensions, race is economically and discursively tied to class, which creates the assumption that black queers cannot consume as fervently as their white counterparts and are therefore not acknowledged to the same degree in space-consumption practices such as the *PLMG* (Tucker 2008, 6; Visser 2003a, 123, 136). The prerogative of white, male and middle-class dispositions therefore play a very important role in determining who are represented as consumer-citizens; fortifying their queer identities through consumption and simultaneously stimulating the consumption of such embodiments by straight onlookers (Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 40; Bell and Binnie 2004, 1809).⁵

The consumerist tone of the *PLMG* is further emphasised by the fact that it is sponsored by a variety of corporate outlets, which include but are not limited to internationally established brands (such as *Absolut Vodka*, *Southern Comfort* and *Lee Cooper Jeans*), tourism bureaus (such as *Club Travel*, *Hot Pink Deals* and *Knysna Tourism*) and print media (such as *Gay Pages*, *Exit* and *Wrapped*). By affiliating themselves with the *PLMG*, these stakeholders seek to link their products or services to the images of queerness promulgated by the festival, since the spectacle that Knysna’s spaces become imbued with attracts tourists more so than the landscape itself (Gotham 2005, 310, 313; Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 52).

The image of queerness that appears in their marketing drives are, however, based on a stifling stereotype of queer identity that obscures the race and class-based power relations within which it operates (Kates 1999, 34).⁶ In order not to tarnish their

corporate image, which may find appeal beyond queer cultures, such sponsors appear to ‘support’ only a homogenised minority of white, male and middle-class queers, because space-marketing is an industry organised to “create and circulate themes, motifs and cultural symbols that potential consumers must easily [identify with and accept] for the advertising to be effective” (Gotham 2002, 1747).

In view of this, the homogenising power of globalisation is also at stake in discourses surrounding the *PLMG*, which like many other festivals of its kind, have marketing strategies and conceptual tactics built on internationally renowned and recognisable events such as the *New Orleans Mardi Gras*: the commodification of pink feathers at the *PLMG*, for example, is utterly reminiscent of the strings of colourful beads (worn around the neck) mass-produced and sold during the *New Orleans Mardi Gras* – both ‘souvenirs’ manifesting as cultural evidence of consumers’ ‘belonging’ to or experience of these spectacles (Gotham 2005, 313-314).

Marketers and corporate sponsors involved in the *PLMG*, whose names adorn the parade’s floats which become mobile signifiers of their brand-images, are therefore aware of the capitalist benefits tied to ‘mimicking’ similar events in the Northern hemisphere, thereby creating an undivided line between Knysna and cosmopolitan spaces or spatial practices in Europe and North America (Tucker 2008, 6; Johnston 2001, 190). The *PLMG* is ultimately “re-imagined in marketing drives to develop a particular niche” in an increasingly globalising queer tourism by remaining local in nature, but global in appeal (Visser 2003b, 170; Visser 2003a, 125; Jeong and Santos 2004, 642).⁷ The adoption of such Westernised traditions not only manifests at the level of commodities and the floats’ insignia, but to some extent also explains the emphasis placed on the image of the ‘good’, white homosexual, which is essentially an explicitly Eurocentric notion (Smith 1994, 64).

The imagined, media-generated queers that create seamlessness between these sponsors and the ‘spectacle’ of the *PLMG* are therefore more often than not based on heteronormative notions of what queers should ‘ideally’ look and behave like. It is, however, important to acknowledge that these ‘place-images’, which are used to connect Knysna’s spaces to a specific experience of ‘queerness’, do not reflect the reality of the *PLMG* – especially not in terms of the parade, which represents the

although the so-called cosmopolitan ‘touristification’ of Knysna during the *PLMG* appears to “indicate a heterosexual acceptance and even embracing of [queer culture], it could equally be viewed as [an] effective means to re-establish heterosexual dominance” (Pritchard et al. 1998, 280).

This is achieved, firstly, by assimilating and effectively heterosexualising a selected ‘type’ of queerness (as discussed with regard to visual representation, advertising and the ‘good homosexual’) (Namaste 1994, 224; Jeong and Santos 2004, 645; Smith 1994, 64; Puar 2002, 943). Secondly, one can argue that a ‘de-gaying’ of the *PLMG*, which attenuates the power of queer culture, occurs because the festival’s overt sense of queerness becomes diluted by the presence of ‘straight’ spectators that manifest as ‘subcultural accruers’ seeking cosmopolitan kudos (Pritchard et. al 1998, 278-279; Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 58; Rushbrook 2002, 193).

The third and thus far unexplored tactic employed by heteronormativity in re-asserting its dominance relates to the manner in which the *PLMG* is essentially restricted to a particular, designated area of Knysna. In other words, the ‘public’ nature of the *PLMG* comes under serious scrutiny when one considers that the parade, for example, follows a predetermined route and is therefore restricted only to certain spaces *within* the larger geography of Knysna (Jeong and Santos 2004, 648, 650). To state that the *PLMG* ‘queers’ Knysna in its entirety overvalues the reach and power of the festival when considering that most of its events and accompanying queer performances only manifest in selected areas, of which Main Street and particular restaurants, bars, nightclubs and stores along it are key sites (with the exception of *one* waterfront-based nightclub, namely *Tryst*, and selected venues in Plettenberg Bay). In other words, Main Street not only encapsulates the *PLMG*, but it also *insulates* the spaces beyond it from queer infiltration.

Allowing for the consumption of queerness from a ‘safe’ or ‘comfortable’ voyeuristic distance, because of the symbolic borders enforced by the route that the parade follows, for example, determines where queerness can be ‘flaunted’ and where it must remain closeted or self-monitored (Kirby and Hay 1997, 301-302; Johnston 1997, 32). These provisions imposed on the *PLMG* are indicative of the manner in which “western hierarchical dualisms violently reinscribe [queer spatial practices] as

private” (Johnston 1997, 30). Knysna’s Main Street and selected businesses that display pink feathers and other queer paraphernalia in their shop-fronts (5), in support of the *PLMG*, become signifiers of spaces that welcome ‘queerness’, but simultaneously represent that it is explicitly ‘at home’ only within their confines. By restricting its scope in terms of being privatised and disconnected from the larger public realm of Knysna, the *PLMG* seemingly finds itself operating within the very heteronormative spatial regime, which shifts ‘queerness’ to the peripheries of culture, from which it initially sought emancipation.



5 *Bellissimo*, Knysna, 2009 (Photograph by the author).

Conclusion

The notion that social spaces, and the power relations that permeate them, are not immutable has led this article to explore the manner in which conflicting sexual orientations and their associated cultures of identity vie for primacy in certain landscapes (Shields 1991, 7, 22). Since heterocentric hegemony perpetually reiterates the ‘invisible visibility’ or normativity of heterosexuality within spaces, the subversive phenomenon of ‘queering space’ was firstly discussed in order to illustrate

that the development of disparate homocentric spaces are symptomatic of contemporary Western, urban cultures (Brickell 2000, 166). For the purposes of this article, the *PLMG* was focused on as an example of spatial dissidence that also operates within a temporal dimension, thereby generating a constant oscillation of power between 'queerness' and heteronormativity.

The prerogatives created for queer culture by the *PLMG*, such as greater political and cultural visibility and uninhibited sexual self-expression, for example, were discussed with specific reference to the notion that tourism is akin to 'escapism' and therefore elevates the festival's status to that of a temporary utopian space in which queers dominate (Mackie 1998, [sp]; Lachmann 1989, 125). Yet, whereas the 'touristification' of this process of social re-spatialisation speaks of liberty in the queer camp, it simultaneously presents heteronormativity with the opportunity to employ the festival's capitalist, consumerist and cosmopolitan undertones in mitigating the newfound cultural gravity of queerness that the *PLMG* supposedly creates (Pritchard et al. 1998, 280). By 'whitening' the publicity images generated for the *PLMG*, heteronormative and 'appeasing' queer media and sponsors collapse the differences between ideally 'straight' and ideally 'homosexual', subsequently attenuating the queer power of the festival by re-structuring it as a space biased more in terms of race, class and gender than sexual orientation in matters of inclusion and exclusion (Jeong and Santos 2004, 645; Rushbrook 2002, 185, 194, 196).

The 'straight tourist gaze' and its acquisition of cosmopolitan knowledge through prejudiced and imagined notions of the *PLMG* as an 'authentic', extraordinary experience, therefore enforces ideological borders that monitor exactly which 'type' of queer most accurately embodies the cultural worth of queerness (Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 40; Gotham 2002, 1737). In regenerating its temporarily subdued control over Knysna's landscapes, heteronormative power must, however, also find a means to monitor the corporeality of the *PLMG*'s parade, which cannot be monitored as effectively as representations of the festival in popular visual culture.

The fixed route that the parade follows, which does not allow for deviation, designates a segment of space *within* the larger sphere of Knysna that 'houses' and therefore 'restrains' the more explicit performances of queerness that characterise the

PLMG (Johnston 1997, 30, 32). The implications of clearly marking where queer culture can be unequivocally ‘queer’, ultimately re-positions heterosexuality at the apex of spatial power relations by creating contained, ‘private’ spaces where queerness can be freely gazed upon by heteronormativity from an elevated (yet sheltered) ‘public’ position of superiority.

Notes

¹ The term ‘gay’ is typically associated with white, male and middle-class men, while ‘lesbian’ is used to exclusively refer to the experiences of homosexual women. ‘Queer’ is used in this context, and throughout the article, to offer inclusivity in terms of gender and race, and to denote a political (sexual) identity aimed at challenging the dominance of heteronormativity (Honeychurch 1995, 212).

² Sixteen years before South Africa’s liberation, the queer community produced *its* Rainbow Flag, designed by Gilbert Baker in 1978. Since its inception, the flag established itself as a staple of queer visual culture and identity, and is flown at gay-owned businesses and residences, and at parades or festivals such as the *PLMG* (Sonnekus 2007, 46).

³ The methodological route followed in this article is based on my personal experience and observation of the *PLMG* (which I attended from 30 April – 3 May 2009) as well as a selected review of literature that engage with tenets of, for example, human geography, tourism, queer studies and cultural studies.

⁴ The scope of this article does not allow for a detailed exploration of the *carnavalesque* characteristics of parody, irony and subversion that contemporary manifestations of Mardi Gras, such as the *PLMG*, seemingly possess (Lachmann 1989, 146). The manner in which the “sacred [which may point toward heteronormativity in this context] is [briefly] profaned” is nonetheless a point worthy of exploration, although it is not explicitly engaged with in the confines of this article (Brickell 2000, 169).

⁵ Queers of colour and lesbians are therefore rarely targeted or portrayed as ‘cosmopolitan’, thereby not only reiterating the masculinist undertones of tourism (as ‘colonialism’) in general, but also the notion that queer tourism is a marker of an “elitist cosmopolitan mobility ... a group momentarily decriminalised through its purchasing power [and supposed ‘likeness’ with the ideals of heteronormativity]” (Mackie 1998, [sp]; Binnie and Skeggs 2004, 44; Puar 2002, 942).

⁶ The linking of consumption and enfranchisement must be scrutinised, since “market forces are human forces hierarchically sustained, queer folk not excluded” (Chasin 2000, 15; Nast 2002, 881). The supposed ‘inclusion’ of queers in the market must not be understood as a

progression toward more social tolerance; it merely illustrates the tendency of marketers to create 'model' queer consumers (hierarchically positioned at the apex of the queer community) that serve to increase profits (Hennessy 1994, 32; Puar 2006, 76).

⁷ One must, however, not lose sight of the fact that such global influences are not necessarily passively accepted and integrated by the *PLMG*. Conceiving of tourism as "a cultural practice suggests that local people can appropriate different ... symbols, motifs and images to ... reinforce and enhance place distinctiveness" (Gotham 2005, 319). The most vital example of such resistance manifests in terms of the emerald green loerie (an indigenous bird that has become almost emblematic of Knysna), which is 'infamously' pinked during the festival. The many images of pink loeries, which evidently resonate with the ubiquity of commodified pink feathers, therefore act as powerful icons that seemingly seek to maintain Knysna's 'uniqueness' and African 'spirit' amidst the many global, cosmopolitan inflections that abound during the festival.

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