Experiments in Freedom

Experiments in Freedom:
Explorations of Identity
in New South African Drama

By

Anton Krueger

**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

Dedicated to those
who keep dedicating their lives
to this strange ancient ritual.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

SELF AS BODY / SELF AS SYMBOL

> In South Africa . . . the crisis of legitimacy has been replaced by a crisis of identity, which has allowed space for intense debate and the flowing of new creative works by those with their eyes fixed on the post-Apartheid culture.
> —Liz Gunner *Politics and Performance*

In 2004[1] Anthony Sher wrote a play about the life of Dimitrios Tsafendas, the man who assassinated South African Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd in 1966. The title of this play, *I.D.*,[2] highlights the anxiety of both protagonist and antagonist who were each in their own way obsessed by a search for identity. Verwoerd codified the system of apartheid as a thesis in the Department of Sociology at the University of Stellenbosch and he was to spend his life delineating the precise nature and means of sanctioning the schema he proposed. This was a formidable structure which rested on a very specific framing of identity in terms of race. This despised system of identification lead to a great deal of pain, anger, hatred, and ultimately, bloodshed. Eventually it also lead to the isolation of the South African government from the international community.

Hendrik Verwoerd was not born in South Africa and Sher suggests that it may have been because he felt himself an outsider that he became so obsessed with issues of identity. Dimitrios Tsafendas was a mixture of Shangaan, Portuguese, German and Greek ancestry and he spent his life as a displaced person within Verwoerd's system, perpetually searching for a place where he might feel he belonged. He was repeatedly rejected and ostracised from various communities as he floated uneasily between the cracks of the edifice designed by Verwoerd. The assassin lived in a liminal state, forever in-between, belonging nowhere, never at home. Sher's play

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[1] For published plays, the date given is the date of publication. For plays that have not been published, the year given indicates when the work was first performed.

[2] *I.D.* premiered at the Almeida Theatre in London in 2004 and was screened on SABC 3 on July 6 2004 at 22:00.

suggests that this dissatisfaction crystallised into a firm hatred for the man who had refused to legitimise Tsafendas' identity.

I.D. highlights the extent to which questions of identity overshadowed all other concerns of the Afrikaaner Nationalist government. When Population Registration Act Number 30 was passed on 7 July 1950 it stipulated that every inhabitant of South Africa be designated an identity by the Office for Race Classification. This was a classification which was to have far reaching consequences. One's capabilities were seen as determined by the description of one's physical characteristics such as the texture and colour of one's hair, the size of one's lips, or the way in which a light reflected from one's skin.[3] The question of identity was at the very foundation of the apartheid project and increasingly precise biological and sociological definitions of the population of the country were used to describe and to control the population. This process might be seen as an apt example of the way in which descriptions of identity can be wielded as a form of power exercised by those formulating the definition.

It is still the case that some or other form of physical description remains the basis for the methods used to construct a legal identity. For example, records such as eye colour, fingerprints, voice, iris, height, scars, dental records and DNA are the forensic tools used to establish the proof of the identity of an individual body. This type of classification of an identity rests on what Paul Ricoeur (1991: 73) defines as "sameness (Latin *idem*)." In other words, it defines the body as being itself. But the physical identification under apartheid was intent on defining a body not only as "itself," but, more importantly, as part of a collective, as part of a group of bodies. In this sense, the individual body was located and defined as being part of a particular narrative.

As a source of identity, the physical body provides a coherent object of investigation but it might also be compared to a blank page in that it cannot provide meaning in and of itself as no body is self-explanatory. A person's identity is more firmly rooted in the ways in which he or she is contextualised in terms of a narrative structure rather than in a substantive inherent, material "essence." The body needs a story before it can become a self. Besides defining identity as *idem* (sameness) Ricoeur also refers to identity as *ipse* "as self" (73), stating that

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[3] This included the infamous 'pencil-in-the-hair-test' in which a pencil was stuck into a person's hair. If it did not fall out, because the curls were too tight, one could then be classified as 'coloured' instead of 'white.'

> [T]he self does not know itself immediately, but only indirectly, through the detour of cultural signs of all sorts, which articulate the self in symbolic mediations (80).

It is within the discourses of this second definition of identity that I would like to position this investigation. I will consequently be examining a number of play texts as cultural signs mediating and articulating a semiology of identity. This approach is in line with current thinking that our primary identifications are not biological, but social constructions;[4] and yet, one should also keep in mind that the debilitating impact which the social construction of the apartheid identity had on the stories South Africans told about their senses of self is inextricable from the material consequences of the classifications introduced by that system.

The story which apartheid told about the people of South Africa was essentially one about hierarchy in that it provided a demeaning description of all races other than the so-called "white" race. Of course, many did not accept this story told by the state legislature, and yet ironically, their resistance to the narrative enforced by the laws of the land often became the very means they used to shape identity. Much of the interest in the literature written during the apartheid era springs from the exploration of ways in which writers resisted the institutionalisation of their identity and the ways in which they challenged the monolithic identity structures propagated by the state. And yet the influence of the apartheid system's description of identity often remained the cornerstone of definitions of identity. In other words, even though the interpretation of racialised categories may have been questioned, the racial identities themselves were often not challenged. This is an issue to which this text will repeatedly return: in order to exercise our freedom, it may be necessary to liberate ourselves not only from the identities imposed on us in the past but from the ways in which those identities were structured.

If one is going to source identity in terms of a story, the question arises as to which of the narratives to select from the myriad stories being told and to notice the moments at which stories change direction. The official version of the story about apartheid changed due to a great many factors and forces including the resistance movement within South Africa, the Communist insurgence on its borders, the country's increasing isolation due to the sanctions and embargoes imposed on it, advances in mass media and increases in international travel which helped to disseminate the

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[4] One example, of many, is laid out in the introduction to *Under Construction: 'Race' and Identity in South Africa Today* (2004: 1-11) by Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn.

notion of democracy as a norm, as well as any number of unquantifiable forces such as changes in perspective which may have been brought about due to transformations in religious or other ethical configurations. As a result of this multiplicity of forces acting on and from within it, the National Party underwent a transformation in 1989 when it gave up resisting the African National Congress. It subsequently unbanned the party and held a referendum on reform in 1991. According to this referendum, most of the "white" population of South Africa were sufficiently convinced that democracy provided a more tenable future for them and they endorsed the first fully democratic elections held in 1994 which swept the ANC into power.

This was an extraordinary turn-around. What is perhaps even more remarkable is that this transformation did not occur in isolation, but was similar to other revolutions across the world which occurred at the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century such as the victory of the Solidarity movement in Poland, the fall of the Berlin wall, and the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union. What was noteworthy about all of these "velvet revolutions"[5] was the apparent transformation of those in power. This was not simply a case of one group winning an outright war against those of a different persuasion and capturing their geographic territory. Instead, the terrain captured here was ideological and much of the impetus for change came from within the ruling governments themselves who underwent a change in perspective.

The dissolution of apartheid and the advent of democracy in South Africa created the opportunity for a complete re-configuration of identity and the transformation of structures of identification. The official description of identity changed radically, and South Africa's new constitution categorically outlaws discrimination in terms of race, previously the mainstay of identity. It may, therefore, come as a surprise to find that sixteen years after liberation race still dominates many discussions of identity. For example, at the time of writing every job application, student registration and request for funding in the arts demands a declaration of race. The *self as body* is in many ways still taken as self evident. At a fundamental level, the story has not changed. In some respects there has not been a transformation of the descriptors of identity, which are still grounded on the idea of race. It is the contention of this study that we urgently need to relinquish our desperate clinging to the

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[5] The term "velvet revolution" was initially used to describe the Czech transformation which brought Vaclav Havel into power, though it is an apt metaphor for many of the other transformations which occurred at this time.

supposedly fixed categories of race, ethnicity, gender, and nationalism and begin to seek out new sources for our identifications. In order to be free, it may be necessary to abandon the pursuit of who we think we are.

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PART I

EXPLORING IDENTITY

CHAPTER ONE

IDENTITIES FIXED AND FLUID

In the *Posterior Analytics*, Aristotle sought to distinguish between what he called "differentiae" and essence, claiming that "not every differentia precludes identity, since many different differentiae inhere in things specifically identical, though not in the substance of these nor essentially" (1952: 97). In referring to an essential quality which identifies any particular thing (as opposed to superficial "differentiae"), Aristotle refers to a conception of identity as unchanging. This is the same formulation of identity which Erika Fischer-Lichte notes in eighteenth century Europe. She demonstrates that in *Letter to Monsieur d'Alembert* (1758), Jean-Jacques Rousseau refers to identity as a static concept and notes that for him "change in identity is out of the question; change can only be experienced and lamented as a falsification of that which is authentic, as a loss of identity" (2002: 1). She goes on to say, however, that in the twentieth century a number of fields in the humanities, including philosophy and anthropology, have developed concepts of identity which "presume change." Fischer-Lichte goes so far as to say that today, "without the potential to transgress certain boundaries and cancel out certain existing differences, identity seems almost an impossibility" (2). Similarly, Marvin Carlson draws attention to an essay by Clifford Geertz called "Blurred Genres," in which Geertz writes that

> traditional anthropological concerns with continuous traditions, singular and stable cultures, coherent structures, and stable identities [have] been largely replaced by a concept of identity and culture as constructed, relational, and in constant flux, with the porous or contested borders replacing centres as the focus of interest, because it is at these borders that meaning is continually being created and negotiated (in Carlson 2003: 206).

It seems that at some point in the scholarship of the twentieth century, a shift occurred in the conception of what it means to have an identity. Instead of seeing identity as the product of a history of stable traditions and communal beliefs, it is today often described in terms of the

transgression of boundaries. Instead of searching for stability as definitive of an identity the search has shifted to areas of friction and instability. Instead of searching for a permanent, coherent identity, there is now, ostensibly, an acceptance of identity as impermanent. In *The Mysteries of Identity: A Theme in Modern Literature*, Robert Langbaum writes:

> As a term in philosophy *identity* used to apply mainly to the unity of objects, especially through an expanse of time . . . The word did not take on its current psychological denotation, it did not begin to apply to self, until the unity of self became problematic (1977: 25).

In other words, one might say that any discussion of identity as selfhood is premised on the suspicion that the self is discontinuous, divided. In South Africa, since the 1994 transition from a Christian Nationalist government, there has been a constitutional shift away from the idea that a ruling party might be capable of representing god-given (and therefore essential) identity structures. And yet, this shift might also have created a sense of dis-ease in that it brings with it a loss of clarity. Many, as I have already indicated, are still holding on to categories of identity previously established under apartheid, while others are trying to patch up a sense of fracture by positing an essentially "free" individuality as the basis for a universal identity. Whatever the case may be, the unity of self in South African society is certainly problematic, which is perhaps why the issue of identity has become such a prominent concern for so many.

I am interested in examining representations of, and reactions to, the loss or lack of a clear unity of self. I am interested in perceptions of identity in crisis and would also like to question whether a perception of identity as unstable, uncertain, and lacking unity should necessarily result in psychic calamity, or whether this instability might turn out to be an indication of an inherently transformative ability which might be regarded as a sign of health. In my investigations into play texts I will certainly not be seeking to discover or invent a totalising conception of the quintessential South African identity.[1] The task of this discourse is not to seek out a new grand narrative under which to homogenise all heterogeneities but rather to provide a glimpse into micro-narratives discerned within frameworks realised by some of the plays published since

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[1] In trying to define identity in South African theatre, one is reminded of Pat Schwartz's comment about Athol Fugard, namely that he "believes that it is as impossible to categorise 'a South African theatre' as it is to categorise 'a South African'" (1988: 157).

the demise of apartheid. I am particularly interested in those representations which not only depict transformation but which are also transformative. These are plays which do not simply seek to represent identities but to create them, plays which not only read culture but write it.

Briefly stated, in this study I mean to explore some of the ways in which identity has been represented in dramatic texts published in South Africa between 1994 and 2004.[2] My way into this terrain is by examining representations of identity largely in terms of characterisation (while not entirely excluding aspects of style, narrative construction and inter-textuality) in a selection of plays published in English. I have also limited the study to publications which have had the largest impact.[3]

The present study is thus rooted in three terrains in contemporary South Africa: configurations of identity (as theory), the theatre (as practice), and selected play texts (as demonstrations of the practice of theory). Before moving on to an examination of some of the play texts produced since 1994, I feel it may be of some value to elaborate aspects related to the other two facets of this study. So I will begin Part I by exploring various ways in which identity has been described from various philosophical, psychological, and anthropological perspectives. I will explore the notion of framing freedom within aspects of the individual and the social self, as well as reflecting on what a study of the theatre entails, while considering some of the potential problems involved in emphasising text over performance. Part I will also elaborate ways in which drama is uniquely suited to represent, as well as to effect, transformations of identity. I then move on to an examination of specific texts in terms of four broad areas of investigation: gender, political affiliation, ethnicity and syncretism.

In Part II I focus on issues of masculinity and exile in plays by Athol Fugard, Anthony Akerman and Zakes Mda. This chapter specifically explores orientations of the masculine which have become embedded within notions of patriotism, and a consideration on some of the failings of masculinised identity.

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[2] Although I do also refer to plays which were staged while I was in the process of writing this book, it remains grounded in publications which emerged in the first decade of democracy.

[3] It will certainly be a contentious issue to try to define *impact*, and there can be no set definition of this. However, I have, for example, only selected publications which have had significant productions, been published by established publishing houses, and which have been accessible to the general public. So, for example, from the outset, I have excluded self-published plays, plays published in readers for school-children, and plays exclusively published in academic journals.

In terms of anti-apartheid affiliations (or what might have previously been referred to as political theatre), I look at what Loren Kruger has called "post-anti-Apartheid theatre" (2002: 233). I consider the trend away from protest theatre as well as the emergence of new forms of protest theatre by the likes of Mike van Graan. This chapter goes on to explore plays which were inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and looks in more detail at *Ubu and the Truth Commission* by Jane Taylor and William Kentridge.

When considering ethnicities, I reflect on how identity in terms of an ethnic collective is most often premised on laws of exclusion and on the construction of what Benedict Anderson refers to as an "imagined community" (1991: 15). Questions of ethnicity are related to notions of nationalism and heritage, and both are explored in Greig Coetzee's *Happy Natives*.

Syncretism seems to present a preferable description of how South African identities can be constructed and I go on to elaborate attempts to forge a new identity in terms of amalgamation and creative fusion of cultural resources with particular reference to the plays of Brett Bailey and Reza de Wet. Next, I refer to the thorny issue of racial identities, and in particular, to the trope of the "rainbow nation" which many writers regard as a problematic, blanketing description which cancels out difference. Ashraf Jamal's "radical syncretism" (which does not seek to subsume heterogeneous identities) is suggested as a more viable means of approaching definitions of identity. Finally, I consider Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's play *Inter-Racial* as an example of a play which parodies race.

In conclusion, I touch on the development of physical theatre in South Africa and describe how the body can be used as a tool for transformation, relying principally on the writings of Mark Fleishman and Eugenio Barba. After examining a range of different ways of constructing identities, the study concludes with the paradoxical thesis that it may be more beneficial in the post-apartheid context to favour processes which relinquish identities instead of those which attempt to consolidate them. Throughout this study, I would like to keep under consideration the question of what it means to have a fixed, and firmly grounded sense of identity (which might provide one with a sense of rootedness and belonging) and to contrast this with a more flexible identity (which might allow one to be more open to change, but which also runs the risk of becoming inchoate).

CHAPTER TWO

FRAMES AND FREEDOM

Charles Taylor's wide-ranging *Sources of the Self* (1989) provides a thorough historical overview of philosophical conceptions of selfhood. Taylor roots a sense of self within a framework and makes the claim that if one is to understand a person's sense of identity one has to be aware of the parameters of her framing perception of value. Early on in this monumental study, Taylor writes:

> I want to defend the strong thesis that doing without a framework is utterly impossible for us; otherwise put, that the horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include some strong qualitative discriminations (27).

Taylor roots a sense of identity in an ability to discriminate, or, otherwise stated, to be able to make judgements. An immediate danger when confronted by the idea of judging is that one might discriminate *against* other people or insist that one's own judgements are the only correct views. The use of the word *discrimination* is particularly problematic in a country like South Africa since the word conjures up our highest ideals (to be a discriminating person) and our lowest (to discriminate against). Nevertheless, acts of judgement are, according to Taylor, an important part in the creation of a framing of identity.

For Taylor, the question of a framework is inextricably tied to notions of the "good" since a framework distinguishes what is deemed desirable or beneficial. Instead of focusing on the borders, margins, and liminal states to which popular contemporary methodologies might refer, Taylor defines identity in terms of central tenets of belief. He claims that in order to understand a formation of self one requires "an understanding of what is of crucial importance to us":

> To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose (27).

Jürgen Habermas uses the word *Lebenswelt* (life-world) to refer to a construction which seems similar to what Taylor calls a framework.[1] For Habermas, the process of communication becomes possible when the horizons of two people are able to forge momentarily into a *horizonverschmeltung* (a "melting of horizons"). In this sense, one's identity is made possible by being in relation to others, not in separation from them. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984), Habermas writes of identity as no longer founded in terms of a cosmic order or on an autonomous individuality, but in terms of communication (or, to be more precise, what Thomas McCarthy, in his introduction to Habermas's book, describes in a Latinate tongue twister as "communicatively shared intersubjectivity" [xxi]).

Jean-Francois Lyotard, on the other hand, questions ways in which a "good" is defined. He sees this definition as occurring, not on an individual level, but rather, in terms of the knowledge produced by a society:

> What is a "good" prescriptive or evaluative utterance, a "good" performance in denotative or technical matters? They are all judged to be "good" because they conform to relevant criteria (of justice, beauty, truth, and efficiency respectively) accepted in the social circle of the "knower's" interlocutors. The early philosophers called this mode of legitimating statements opinion. The consensus that permits such knowledge to be circumscribed and makes it possible to distinguish one who knows from one who doesn't (the foreigner, the child) is what constitutes the culture of a people (1984: 19).

What Taylor sees as definitive of a self, Lyotard sees as definitive of a collective.[2] Instead of providing a stable point of identification, the self may equally be described in terms of a *heteroglossic* index as a site of many voices vying for control. Whether or not the self can be circumscribed as a singular entity, or whether it is, as Deleuze and Guattari maintain, an assemblage, is crucial for further explorations into the ways in which a description of self is used as a critical index of identity. The question of whether the self is able to freely frame its identity, and what

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[1] "Communication takes place within a lifeworld that remains at the backs of participants in communication. It is present to them only in the prereflective form of taken-for-granted background assumptions" (1984: 335).
[2] This tension between the individual and the group is a point which will be sustained throughout this book.

the parameters of freedom here are taken to be, is important to this perspective.

Perhaps the greatest change in the public ethos of the South African government has been the enthusiastic embracing of the concept of freedom as a value shared by all. The Afrikaaners, the British, the Zulu and the Xhosa have all rallied around the word *freedom* in order to endorse their respective claims to land, movement and self-determination. But the word has been more recently employed as an urgent meeting place between different cultures and across various ethnic groups, and not solely as designating the specific freedom of a particular people. Freedom is not only a frame which South Africans have been able to share with each other but also an ideal (and idealised) common denominator which can be employed in conversations with other countries from which the South African government was previously excluded on the basis of its selective understanding of the concept of freedom.

Charles Taylor states that one universal in the modern world is "the centrality of freedom as a good" (1989: 395). In fact, he goes further to say that freedom is a "hyper-good," a good which supersedes all others. It forms part of what might be referred to as a modern myth with reference to the liberation of the individual. This myth also played an important role in the impetus which inspired the American struggle for independence from Britain as well as the French revolution against their aristocracy. The ideals of freedom also motivated the various impulses leading towards the eventual dissolution of European Colonial Empires after the First World War and the move towards independence in African states after the Second. It seems that the last centuries have been infused by perpetual struggles for freedom. Perhaps the single most important work at the very beginning of this movement towards the enfranchisement of individual liberty is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (1762), in which Rousseau searches for an answer to the single perplexing question of how the collective strength of a group could be utilised to protect the liberties of the individual:

> How to find a form of association which will defend the person and the goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with the others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before (2004: 14).

This tension between belonging to a group while expressing and exploring one's freedom as an individual is not satisfactorily resolved by the democratic process. Throughout this text I will be exploring the paradox that exists between what Rousseau refers to as the "general will"

and the "private will"(19), as well as the contradictory desires for both "civil liberty" and "natural liberty" (21). Rousseau attempts to resolve some of the dilemmas created by these frictions by emphasising the separation of civil and religious matters, and by endorsing the Marquis d' Argenson's maxim that "everyone is perfectly free to do what does not injure others" (165). To greater or lesser degrees, these two principles are still the mainstays of many democratic states.

Perhaps Rousseau's greatest influence on the modern state was more pragmatic than philosophical in that it defined a free society not substantively as "some conception of a good society," but rather "by the procedure of its inauguration" (Taylor. 1989: 86). This aspect of freedom as defined by a civil process is certainly a practical and visible result of certain ideologies, and yet, even though an absolutely crucial aspect of South African identities lies in the agreement about freedom being a good, the ways in which freedom is defined may differ. Appeals towards freedom can include the desire for emancipation (whether this be in terms of colonialism, gender, or economic dependence), or they could appeal to the freedom to turn one's body against itself: taking recreational drugs, having abortions or killing oneself. There is also the freedom towards the expression of idiosyncratic, and possibly iconoclastic, views—both "freedom from" and "freedom to."

Charles Taylor notes that Kant stresses a formation of "freedom as self-domination" which distinguishes free actions from those bound by duty (83). Perhaps this distinguishes the Modern Age from the Victorian era in Britain, the shift away from an emphasis on duty towards an emphasis on personal freedom. Rene Descartes considered the somewhat blasphemous notion that freedom is a great virtue because it is a quality we share with God. He wrote:

> Now freewill is in itself the noblest thing we can have because it makes us in a certain manner equal to God and exempts us from being his subjects; and through its rightful use is the greatest of all the goods we possess, and further there is nothing that is more our own or that matters more to us. From all this it follows that nothing but freewill can produce our greatest contentments (in Taylor: 147).

In his conclusion to *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor underlines the importance of this hyper-good, claiming that out of all other goods it grants one the greatest sense of meaning: "[t]he fully significant life is the one which is self chosen" (383). And yet, how does freedom to do as one desires compare to the freedom gained, for example, by mastering one's impulses and desires? This raises a perplexing question concerning

configurations of the self, whether or not one is really free to choose one's identity, and whether one can control the expression of that self. Also, to what extent is identity created within the act of expression? Can one even speak of an identity existing anterior to its articulation? Furthermore, if identity is a matter of belief in a framework of values (which encompasses nothing less than one's worldview or *weltanschauung*), to what extent is one in a position to choose that view? An apocryphal anecdote has Max Weber positing that although he agrees with the relativity inherent in worldviews, one still cannot step into a worldview as easily as one climbs into a taxi. Part of the problem for Taylor is that it is impossible today to endorse a single global framework as "frameworks today are problematic":

> What is common to them all is the sense that no framework is shared by everyone, can be taken for granted as *the* framework tout court, can sink to the phenomenological status of unquestioned fact (17).

Taylor is not necessarily endorsing what Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984) refers to as "meta-narratives," since, despite his anti-postmodern tendencies (to which I will return), he is clearly not sanctioning a universalising framework which encompasses all others. Taylor appears to have a nostalgia for frameworks which might have been more widely shared, and he notes, for example, that the loss of moral horizons which were taken to be the same for all within a mythologised society, is part of Max Weber's definition of disenchantment (12).

Lyotard also sees freedom as a key modern good in that it forms one of the "two major versions of the narrative of legitimation" (1984: 31). These narratives, according to Lyotard, are the means by which modern societies define what is true, and they form the basis for decisions concerning which knowledge is deemed to be worth pursuing. The narrative about freedom sees "humanity as the hero of liberty" (31), and is also referred to as concerning "the emancipation of humanity" (51). As a legitimation of true knowledge, Lyotard claims that "in the context of the narrative of freedom, the State receives its legitimacy not from itself but from the people," (31) and yet, paradoxically, he sees this narrative as a means by which the state attains power over the individual, in the name of progress:

> The State resorts to the narrative of freedom every time it assumes direct control over the training of the "people," under the name of the "nation," in order to point them down the path of progress (32).

Freedom can thus, paradoxically, become a means of legitimising an exercise of the power of the state rather than an expression of the liberty of

an individual. This use of the notion of freedom is a defensive mechanism by a system which fears that it may be disrupted. Every system fights for the freedom to continue its existence, to carry on operating in the way in which it has been operating so that even improvements to the system can at times be resisted as threats to its stability. But freedom can also mean the freedom to invent, to be original, and, as Jacques Derrida writes in *Acts of Literature* (1992):

> An invention always presupposes some illegality, the breaking of an implicit contract; it inserts a disorder into the peaceful ordering of things, it disregards the proprieties . . . it unsettles the givens (312).

This use of freedom as rebellion, as revolution against the totalising ordering of society, will also have to be taken into consideration. Have post-apartheid writers made use of their freedom by unsettling traditions in South Africa or have they reinforced the reification of past mythologies? What is of particular interest is how freedom has been used to armour collectives established in terms of ethnicity or race against intrusions from other bodies. In other words, newfound freedoms to express cultural identities have sometimes resulted in a willing suspension of personal freedom for the sake of a consolidated, communal expression.

One might also wonder whether the freedom which liberates one from social constraints is necessarily to one's advantage. For example, the psychotic is also completely detached from others, suffers and causes suffering as a result of this. Individuality is, admittedly, an untidy concept to bring into a discussion such as this one. Still, individuality and freedom remain two of the strongest values assumed in terms of creating a contemporary sense of self. Yet individuality is not a concept one can easily pin down. For example, can individuality be expressed without resorting to collective descriptions which might resonate with a shared community? Would one assume that everybody possesses an equal measure of individuality or does individuality refer more to a style of personality which might be cultivated and expanded? Watered down by overuse, the term slips and slides out of one's grasp. It is a word often implying a range of positive associations (originality, courage, responsibility), and yet, it is also linked to negative connotations (selfishness, alienation, isolation). It seems impossible to write a history of individualism. Although one might be able to identify general tendencies in specific works (such as contrasting the Romantic poets' preference for individuality with those of, say, the Augustans), the whole point of being an individual is that one is not tied to an institution.