



Zombie monument: Public art and performing the present

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ABSTRACT

Art in public space in South Africa is increasingly a more visible locus of sociopolitical resistance and recalibration of the public sphere. This article focuses upon an emblematic example: the sculpture of a former colonialist, removed from its public university site in Cape Town following sustained protests. Since April 2015, the empty plinth of Cecil John Rhodes has become a site of re-imagination – from graffiti interventions to performance and installation art. While the plinth continually morphs in symbolism and significance, its ousted artwork waits at an undisclosed location for its fate to be decided. This interregnum represents a liminal condition that theorists call ‘third space’, extended in this research towards a fourth dimension of performativity. The physical disappearance of the artwork has triggered a second life, its apogee a national protest movement with global resonance. *Rhodes Must Fall* and *Fees Must Fall* are student-led calls for university decolonisation and free education arguably best understood as provocation around systemic issues in society. As this deeper work ensues amid fractious contestations, the artwork's re-animation of the public sphere is clear. Its leftover plinth is political, making visible other kinds of structural voids. It is also poetic: a zombie monument demonstrating through its reinventions public space as common space – contested, negotiated and performed in the daily creation of city futures.

1. Introduction

A figure stands upon an assortment of empty plinths, which previously bore colonial-era statues in Angola's capital city of Luanda, and stages enactments that re-imagine these memorials for contemporary times. In one pose, the man adopts a confident stance, dressed in a grey outfit with flared trousers. In another, he is caught in the full flow of a book recital and is garishly dressed in green, blue and yellow, with red stockings. These enactments form part of a photographic series by artist Kiluanji Kia Henda, entitled *Redefining the Power*.

The power is also being redefined about 3500 km south of Luanda, in the South African city of Cape Town where an empty plinth previously bore a colonial-era figure. This plinth is centrally located at a public university campus, overlooking the city's southern suburbs. It is the former perch of a statue of Cecil John Rhodes, an imperialist and colonialist. The bronze Rhodes sculpture was created by Marion Walgate and unveiled in 1934. Over 80 years later, in April 2015, the artwork was removed to a temporary undisclosed location in the wake of protests. Its sizeable plinth was then covered by a wooden crate and, at time of writing, remains this way.

However, as with Henda's photographic work, the plinth has taken

on an intriguing performative life of its own. This article narrates a series of public interventions before and after the statue's removal and considers their larger significance. The primary research method in this arts-based inquiry was repeat site visits using iterative observation techniques, borrowing from Anthropology to ‘follow the thing’ (the artwork). The aim is to demonstrate how visual art has the capacity to recalibrate the public sphere by acting as vector of both resistance and radical re-imagination. In so doing, it draws upon the author's recent research into a trilogy of art interventions in Johannesburg (‘New Imaginaries’) that during 2012 explored public space (Gurney, 2015). These employed walking or ambulatory thinking, subversive play and performance art.

Two key findings were posited in this earlier work, which inform and enable researcher observations in the Rhodes case study. Firstly, an accretive appreciation builds throughout the trilogy of public space understood as common space – contested, negotiated, and daily enacted by multiple parties. “The common is full of productive moments of resistance that create new vocabularies, solidarities, social and spatial practices and relations and repertoires of resistance” (Chatterton, 2010: 626). Public space is constituted through dynamic acts of ‘commoning’, as Chatterton terms it. The second key point relates to the ephemeral

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and nomadic characteristics of the *New Imaginaries* trilogy, which meant it was beyond easy capture – financial or otherwise. The findings helped deliver a riposte to an instrumentalist rationality currently pervading arts policy discourse and articulated by South Africa's own arts strategy, *Mzansi's Golden Economy*. That pervasive approach broadly validates the art sector economically as an industry, privileging growth of Gross Domestic Product, jobs and foreign exchange earnings.² The Conclusion offered an alternative value script that positioned public art as part of an urban commons, privileging public interest.

This idea of common space, in turn, was built upon Homi Bhabha's notion of Third Space, where hybridity and ambiguity allow for other, often incommensurable, positions to emerge (Bhabha, 2004). His writings have been influential in cultural politics; they engage colonialism, race and identity and provide a theoretical framework for this article. As Bhabha writes, “terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively” (2004: 3). This article expands the notion of third space, exemplified by the empty plinth, towards a fourth dimension of performativity. Further, it corresponds to the potential of an undercommons, as articulated by Harney and Moten (2013) who also apply this concept to the university itself.

Third space has a number of variants. Edward Soja developed ‘thirdspace’ as a way to understand spatiality and act to change it, drawing in turn upon Henri Lefebvre's ideas around spatial knowledge and its social production. Soja writes: “*Everything* comes together: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history” (Soja, 1996: 56–7, original emphasis). Other interpretations include: “an alternative to dualistic epistemologies” (Pile, cited in Law, 1997: 109) that incorporates a new geometry of knowledge, or a ‘third space’; a variety of ‘third places’ that comprise community hangouts (Oldenburg, 1989), ‘non-places’ (Augé, 1995) and creolised urban spaces (Nuttall & Michael, 2000). Third space is neither the material space we experience nor a representation of it but “a space of representation... bearing the possibility of new meanings, a space activated through social action and the social imagination [where] unexpected intersections possess liberatory potential” (Crawford, 1999: 29).

The understanding of performativity to apprehend the Rhodes case study is drawn from the field of contemporary art. Visual art practices since the 1960s have opened themselves up to a theatricality that suggests processes of art production and reception as performative, with meaning enacted through interpretive engagements rather than a static object with prescribed signification (Jones & Stephenson, 1999). “The notion of the performative highlights the open-endedness of interpretation, which must thus be understood as a process rather than an act with a final goal... in the complex web of relations among artists, patrons, collectors, and both specialized and non-specialized viewers” (1999: 12). Moreover, such visual art practices tap into the shifting nature of the city's multiple modalities and a broader ‘performative turn’, acknowledged in theory and by human geography specifically in the 1990s (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht, 2010). This ephemeral turn matters in a current moment of intensified financialisation that increasingly puts art, and the academy, to work.

This case study has renewed relevance in the light of ongoing contestations around Confederacy symbols in the United States (US). Most recently, violent clashes in August 2017 flared in Charlottesville, Virginia, around the mooted removal of a statue of a Confederate military leader, Robert Lee. While every situation concerning symbols from the past has its own singularities, some insights can be drawn from

Cape Town and perhaps some parallels. For one thing, the statues of Lee and Rhodes in effect venerate oppression through past ideologies which continue to shape present realities. This in a broader context of contemporary right-wing political gains in both the United States and parts of Europe. Regarding the statues as heritage symbols that only speak about history is a position most readily available to those for whom such realities are not a daily lived condition. The leftover plinth at the University of Cape Town (UCT) thus provokes a common abiding question of public interest: what do we do with the unfinished business of the past?

That question is a pointed consideration for postcolonial societies. In 1994, South Africa finally shed apartheid, which was declared by the United Nations General Assembly as a crime against humanity, and transitioned into democracy. Yet the material realities for the majority are still inflected by the inequities of the past. Such concerns evidently formed part of the agitation around the Rhodes statue. This article posits the wishful thinking that artworks may embody as offering a transformative hinge towards re-imagining those selfsame realities. This is set in contradistinction to magical thinking, which wishes such realities away. Through the disruption of the voided plinth, the case study stresses the potential of the transient, nomadic and local over the concrete, permanent and spectacular to perform social imaginaries anew – and hence city futures.

2. Context

Monuments are rigid both in their physiognomy and limited capacity to represent change and after a while such monuments “fail to represent the changing perception of the events they are supposed to commemorate and of the people responsible for such acts of commemoration” (Lambert & Ochsner, 2009: 11). This is particularly the case for societies that have witnessed political regime change. Post-apartheid South Africa has largely kept historical artworks in public spaces and commissioned new ones alongside, reflecting the reconciliatory approach of a politically negotiated transition. This is evident in other examples of public culture: the multilingual national anthem stitches together old and new. That said, for complex reasons, artworks in varying contexts have recently become sites of spectacle where differing views collide and these contestations play out in the public sphere. The most recent example is the public sculpture of Rhodes hoisted from its plinth.

This action may initially seem reactionary but a brief diversion into the sociology of spatial inequality helps contextualise expressions in South African public space. But first, what is understood by public space? “The geography of public space... can best be defined as the relationship between the physical materiality of specific kinds of (generally) publicly accessible spaces, the processes that structure inclusion and exclusion, and the struggles to change (or maintain) both the structures and form of public space. The interaction of these elements produces public space as (actually existing) public space” (Mitchell & Staeheli, 2009: 512–13). Public art is art outside of museums and galleries and must fit within at least one of the following categories, according to Cartiere & Willis (2008: 15, *emphasis mine*): in a place accessible or visible to the public: *in public*; concerned with or affecting the community or individuals: *public interest*; maintained for or used by the community of individuals: *public place*; or paid for by the public: *publicly funded*.

It is well understood the country remains a markedly unequal society despite democratic gains. One of the world's highest Gini co-efficients, a measure of income inequality, reflects this disparity, and recent government statistics show that more than half of South Africans (55%) in 2015 lived in poverty (Lehohla, 2017). However, it is generally less appreciated how these inequities are spatially replicated in the present tense (Bernstein, Altbeker, & Johnston, 2016; Integrated Urban Development Framework (IUDF), 2016; Karuri-Sebina, 2016; Moreno et al., 2016). Speaking about South Africa's National

² Policy is at time of writing under consideration through a review process of the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage.

Development Plan, a blueprint set of aims to 2030, Philip Harrison said spatial dysfunctionality was an important contributor to inequality.³ His point was underscored on the same panel by another academic, Alan Mabin, who said the grand plan of apartheid was about power but the subtext was space. This reality relates back to a series of apartheid spatial segregation laws through land dispossession. Today, urbanization exacerbates the situation as urban sprawl reinforces economic centralities for a privileged minority and the peripheries for the majority. Taking this sociology of space into account helps conceive of the Rhodes plinth as an artistic provocation in itself: the voided sculpture draws attention to other kinds of dispossessions and absences. This article now turns to the sequence of events that helped this dead monument come back to life.

3. Case study: #RhodesMustFall

In March 2015, a public sculpture on the main campus of UCT became the focal point of national and some international attention. A month later, it was crated and hoisted by crane onto a flatbed truck and spirited to an undisclosed location while its future was discussed. The campus is a provincial heritage site so the public has a say. More than two years later, the sculpture is still in storage limbo. There have been four major offers to buy it – including from the Crow Foundation in the US where the statue would join a sculpture garden in Texas alongside representations of Winston Churchill and Vladimir Lenin. Despite its physical disappearance, and perhaps because of it, this artwork depicting Cecil John Rhodes is leading a second life beyond the containment of its material form. Following its removal, the artwork has paradoxically entered public space in an entirely new way. It has helped recalibrate the public sphere with a series of performative interventions set out below.

It all began with an act of defiance. A UCT student, Chumani Maxwele, in March 2015 delivered a protest at the statue's base. He wore a bright pink construction worker's helmet and blew a whistle – working-class attire later replicated by students in related demonstrations. He placed a placard, which protested white arrogance, around his neck. And he threw a portable canister of human faeces at the centrally placed campus statue of Rhodes (1853–1902). This was a radical act with political resonance, given the sociology of space referenced earlier. Dumping human waste in protest has precedence in the Western Cape province where inadequate sanitation measures are regarded by certain activists as a form of infrastructural violence. The Social Justice Coalition (SJC), for example, conducts social audits in Cape Town communities where the bucket system and informal sanitation solutions still prevail. Linked to this ongoing situation, toilet cannisters have been spilled at high-profile public sites including the city's international airport, the provincial legislature building, and a financial company's headquarters.

Incidentally, a portable toilet cannister was used in protest a few months prior to Maxwele's action, at one of Cape Town's top commercial galleries. The anonymous *Tokolos Stencil Collective* placed a portable toilet in the middle of the gallery's white-cube environs to bring the abject nature of real poverty into an exhibition that dealt with dissenting voices in the city. Their provocation was turfed out. In response, the collective graffiti-bombed the front wall with the words “Bourgeois Gallery” and “Dehumanisation Zone”.

The Rhodes sculpture at UCT was not just an historical curiosity for the majority of students who passed it on a daily basis. Sandile Radebe, an artist who often works in public space, was at the time of its removal preparing a participatory artwork in Cape Town that reimagined a more inclusive city. History had to be balanced against psychological aspects, Radebe said, because it was also traumatic for many people: “It has

deep psychological impacts that last a lifetime and [the statue is] in this public space... It impacts on a person's quality of life, perceptions of self, how they feel, relations to the world they live in” (personal interview, 2015). The difficulty, however, lay in the comprehensive nature of the real work at hand. “Where do we start and where do we stop?” is how he framed this dilemma.

Such factors were made clear by students who gathered in daily meetings at the statue's feet, meetings which spontaneously followed Maxwele's protest action. That dialogue was sophisticated and clear about demands for a differently constituted present, and embodied emotive appeals for other ways of thinking the situation through. “It's psychological. We do not want to be dominated... Transformation is changing the psychology of white people,” one passerby offered. A younger generation felt sold out by their elders' compromises towards a negotiated political settlement that left other legacies untransformed. A tall man grasping a book bag delivered an impassioned plea to his fellow students, which invoked freedoms enshrined in the American constitution. The allusion was sufficient to reverberate with another contemporary struggle on another continent – Black Lives Matter. The latter, created in the US in 2012, describes itself as working for the validity of black life and to (re)build the black liberation movement.

Too often architecture has deployed various built environments as registers of fear, of keeping people in a certain line and state of hesitancy, writes AbdouMaliq Simone (2011: 364). The emphasis has been on so-called strange attractors such as monuments, shopping malls, skylines, and big projects that often turn into ‘dead zones’ – making claims on space that rule out a wide range of uses, he adds. Simone asks what a daily living architecture then points to: “In Africa, ordinary citizens have a major role producing the built environment... At times, dilemmas are simply lived out in highly fractured performances, where residents dramatize the inability to be discernable subjects or citizens of any kind” (2011: 359). Furthermore, the history represented by statues is “a closure” that inhibits the imagining of alternative futures by denying the possibility of alternative pasts but if it dislocates the assumptions of an ‘official’ history, it is an act of resistance (Miles, 1997: 50).

With his fractured performance, Maxwele set in motion a series of iterative interventions. These may collectively be considered, in coming to grips with their meaning, akin to a durational work of performance art (time, body and space as medium). They dislocated assumptions and allowed for new understandings to emerge. Following the statue's removal, the artwork's void created a space of possibility albeit a fraught one – for being heard and for listening. Arts and culture serve to render visible alienation and contradiction and just as importantly to invite dialogue (Fraser, 2014: 13). A therapeutic technique in planning called ‘speaking out’ is important to create a space for speaking the unspeakable (Sandercock, 2000: 24).

Following Maxwele's action, the Rhodes statue first of all became a literal canvas conveying the various sentiments of students for and against its removal. The words of a poem by David Diop, *The Time of the Martyr*, were plastered to the plinth's stone base. The statue was wrapped in black plastic garbage bags and bound with packaging tape. This aesthetic recalled the monumental wrappings of artist Christo Vladimirov Javacheff. Later, this shroud was also replicated in the black tarp draped over the Lee statue in Emancipation Park, Virginia, to commemorate a woman who was killed while protesting against a gathering of white supremacists. *Rhodes Must Fall* read a cardboard placard hanging on the UCT statue's back. The phrase instantly became a Twitter hashtag, and then a new movement broadly termed ‘fallism’. A visual cartoon stuck to the base depicted a layer cake of oppression topped with the words “white privilege”. In tandem with these physical interventions, another phenomenon emerged. The artwork earned an online afterlife and became a digital meme. The contestations fuelled cartoons, dominated media space and conversation bandwidth.

This disruption electrified the student body. Assemblies physically relocated from the base of the statue to become part of the broader

³ *Faces of the City* (2015) seminar series, University of the Witwatersrand. Author's notes.

Occupy movement, taking over a section of the university's administration block and later other campus sites in protest. Signage proliferated: stencils of an "Eject" button; stickers about decolonisation; fliers for meetings. #RhodesMustFall soon spread to other university campuses. Stellenbosch University (also in the Western Cape) replaced an apartheid-era plaque with the country's democratic flag. In time, the Open Stellenbosch movement launched around racial transformation issues, mobilised by an online video which went viral.

The Rhodes statue soon got covered for protection with a rectangular crate. This concealment emptied its base of daily debating students but did not stop the conversation. The stunted plinth became a forum instead. "#MaxMustFall" quipped one contribution, referring to the university's vice-chancellor Max Price, and other slogans followed. A nearby newspaper billboard strapped to a traffic pole correctly predicted: *The Inevitable Fall of Rhodes*. A month later, the statue was indeed hoisted by crane and stored. A graffiti artist subsequently rendered the shadow of Rhodes cascading from the plinth, hand pensively resting under his chin.

The plinth and painted shadow has remained in situ, attracting continued interactions. In September 2016, the plinth was turned into an installation with an empty plastic chair replacing the former seat of Rhodes. People clambered up and created re-enactments of their own. A discarded note on the ground warned: "Sit at own risk". The chair was later draped with a green blanket and white cross. These props are symbols of the 2012 Marikana tragedy near Rustenburg where 44 people were killed in a mining wage dispute. As curator Gabi Ngcobo told a public art conference at UCT, *Remaking Place*, strategies of re-enactments are strategies of confronting ghosts or phantoms, "a paradoxical hurt one chases after in order to chase away" (2015, author's notes). Two rubbish bins at the statue's feet marked "recycle" and "non-recycle" evoked the tension between flux and stasis. A board alongside listing campus heritage sites was erased to a blank slate. On a more recent visit in 2017, a poster stuck to the plinth by the local Scouts troop listed the Morse code alphabet. It seemed an apt provocation about communicating across differently embedded positions. Opinion among the public and students themselves was notably divergent regarding the protests, their meaning, what transpired, and how to deal with it.

To that end, formal processes were convened to try address these nested issues. At UCT, these have included alternative dispute resolution and an artworks task team. The Institutional Reconciliation and Transformation Commission was formed, loosely modelled on the country's groundbreaking Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC, which concluded in the late 1990s, was a series of public hearings about apartheid human rights abuses. The students refer to this ongoing Commission process at the university as Shackville TRC. This in reference to a makeshift structure of an informal shack, which they constructed on the main campus plaza in February 2016, almost a year after Rhodes fell, along with a chemical toilet. The aim was to highlight inadequate accommodation and other structural issues. The shack was also part of the project to disrupt the architectural tone of the university, according to social media posts. The shack was soon destroyed by authorities, re-assembled, and broken down again. At the same time, other statues on campus were spraypainted with red paint. Students also took portraits, photographs, collages and other artworks from residence halls and burnt them together with a wheelie bin. Just before midnight that same evening, an incendiary device was thrown into the window of the vice-chancellor's office.

The ripple effects were not confined to the campus of this permeable public university, which has no gates or perimeter fencing. In public squares, related dramatisations soon took place. A Pretoria statue erected in 1954 of Paul Kruger, a political and military figure of the 19th century, was splashed with green paint and later fenced off, a statue of a Portuguese poet in Durban was painted red, and a statue of Mahatma Gandhi in Johannesburg was painted white. Some months later, another visage of Rhodes, at a public memorial site overlooking

Cape Town called Rhodes Memorial, had its nose angle-grinded off during the dead of night. This in apparent reference to the Russian playwright Nikolai Gogol's absurdist play, *The Nose*, where the main character's nose develops a life of its own. That site was also marked with graffiti including "Your dreams of empire will die". Protests spread to other campuses, including the University of Johannesburg where a 1000-seater auditorium was fire-bombed. Students were detained and court cases ensued, classes were suspended, exams delayed. *Fees Must Fall* took root.

A common refrain among the different UCT protest actions was a call for free education, decolonisation of the curriculum, and insourcing of contracted-out university workers. Numerous recent events have taken decolonisation as theme, a term with variable meanings. Academic Mahmood Mamdani was invited to UCT in 2017 to deliver a memorial lecture on campus – 16 years after an altercation with the same university's management over issues including syllabus. He said he returned "because Rhodes fell", and continued: "The university was the original structural adjustment programme. Its ambition was to create universal scholars who stood for excellence regardless of context – one size fits all – and who would serve as the vanguard of the civilising mission without reservation or remorse. If you regard yourself as prisoners of this ongoing colonising project, then your task has to be one of subverting that process from within through a series of [acts] that sift through the historical legacy and contemporary reality, discarding some parts and adapting others to a new-found purpose – in short, decolonisation" (Mamdani, 2017).

Decolonisation was also linked to deeper issues. Francis Nyamnjoh (2016), an academic at UCT, points out that the student protests for decolonisation were preceded by xenophobic protests against foreign nationals. He wrote a book that, among other things, links these two events together. Nyamnjoh argues in his conclusion for a more fluid and open-ended idea of citizenship, common humanity and mutual accommodation beyond regressive logics (Nyamnjoh, 2016: 239–50). "This struggle is about all of us," said Namane Kutekani, a student leader of the Economic Freedom Front (2015, author's notes). Kutekani said the students had received support from countries as far afield as Germany, that the fight was a global one. He was speaking as part of an October 2015 protest gathered outside the Cape Town Magistrate's court to support detained students and let them know that "you are our people". The protests caught the public imagination. A splinter group took over a supermarket in Khayelitsha, about 30 km from Cape Town central, under the banner #BreadPricesMustFall. Deeper issues were also evident when the French economist Thomas Piketty came to deliver a public lecture at UCT on the topic of inequality, and protestors disrupted proceedings. They carried white crosses and told the audience that the people who should be in the lecture hall as subjects of the conversation were outside sweeping the trash.

Another sidestep to France is relevant. The day before presenting a paper that informs this article, in July 2015, a serendipitous visit to a Paris public museum, Musée Carnavalet, recounted through installations and exhibitions the history of that city in 140-plus rooms. Uncanny parallels began with an early storyboard: "In 1789, before the opening of the Estates General, the people of Paris were severely affected by a bad winter, a rise in the price of bread and increased unemployment." From this date forwards, symbols of despotism and social inequality were physically attacked. One exhibition room was dedicated to such examples – statues of kings, saints, crosses, fleurs-de-lis and coats of arms. They were broken, defaced or hammered to pieces, mostly in concerted response to various laws, thereby creating "a new kind of public space". Many such objects, however, were not destroyed but instead displayed in public for the very first time rather than reserved for the elite. It could be said that the French Revolution invented the notion of national heritage, the museum board concluded, and was the creator of the first museums including the Louvre. The visit gave pause for thought about how notions of public space and art change over time and in different contexts. It also offered yet another idea of

third space - the commoners were considered the third estate of the realm, after clergy and nobility.

Back in South Africa, public intellectuals took the students' cue. Author Thando Mqolozana, for instance, drew a direct parallel in his stated intention in 2015 to opt out of literary festivals in a protest about infrastructural faultlines in broader society and likewise called for its decolonisation. David Goldblatt, one of South Africa's foremost artists, told a weekly newspaper: "That students threw shit over Cecil John Rhodes is a very important and significant event. The significance lies in asking what values were they expressing in those actions. Get to grips with those and I think you're beginning to understand some of the forces at work in this country" (Kuper, 2015).

The ephemeral afterlife of the Rhodes sculpture, as described by these various interventions, suggests potential re-imagination for the monument's plinth in the spirit of Henda in Luanda. Such re-imagination requires a play with the politics and poetics of the void. One comparable example is London's ongoing public space project of the Fourth Plinth at Trafalgar Square, where artists are invited to re-imagine this empty pedestal in a rolling contemporary monument competition. The fourth Trafalgar plinth previously stood bare for 150 years of debate. Antony Gormley's contribution in 2007, entitled *One & Other Plinth*, invited members of the public to claim the empty plinth for one hour each on a sequential basis for 100 days and do whatever they felt inclined to while up there. Gormley wrote about this performative artwork in the accompanying catalogue: "The original idea... came from the question – what are plinths for? They usually have on them important people who have served their country and are in some way heroes, people who we are invited to look up to. I wanted to democratise this." The idea of sculpture itself was vaporised with Gormley's artwork, moving from the traditional genre of self-contained object into the fourth dimension of performative intervention, according to Sally Shaw (2012: 14–15). In the same catalogue, she writes: "*One & Other* symbolizes our intense fascination with, and disappointment in, our individual and collective appearance."

Likewise, the empty Rhodes plinth and its performative wake is concerned with the interface of the individual with a collective body. It is perhaps no coincidence that many of the related gatherings and protests were an embodied expression of this dynamic. In particular, a group of students who occupied the university's Fine Art school, on a satellite campus in the CBD, literally put their bodies on the line as a strategy. This group, which called itself Umhlangano ('the gathering'), created an institutional shut-down for two months from October 2016, when protests flared again as the government gave universities discretion to selectively increase fees. Umhlangano turned this satellite campus into a site of protest. The vehicle entrance to Michaelis School of Fine Art was barricaded and classes were suspended.

Umhlangano's strategy was a combination of subversive play and physical vulnerability. Their aims, as described by one participant, was to break down silos of disciplinary knowledge and move into a fourth dimension. Predominantly, the group comprised LGBTIQ+ students and was led by women. In response to increased security on campus, which included armed guards, Umhlangano made costumes and created installations of balloons and visual artworks from whatever was to hand – found objects, everyday materials, physical interactions. Some of these artworks, including the balloons, were forcibly removed at one point by security guards; they were deemed illegal structures that contravened a court interdict. Affiliated arts campuses hoisted balloons in support. Language was a major concern and students masked existing signboards with tape to rename key venues from predominantly white, male names to honour black artists instead. For instance the school itself, named after its benefactor Max Michaelis, was dubbed Helen Sebidi, after a South African visual artist. The student protestors also assembled an exhibition of artworks in the Michaelis Gallery, which doubled during the shutdown as a sleeping area. Facilitated discussions, which included artistic interventions, were held.

Umhlangano's premise was to create a safe space from which to

work, live and create artworks, performances and discussion on how to move things forward. The first point on a declared talk agenda was the politics of space. "#OurSpace" read a cardboard sign next to a series of inverted chairs. The tense occupation finally came to an end in late December 2016 when students reached a broader agreement with UCT about a way forward, and that process continues at time of writing. The abiding image from the shutdown was an artwork banner strung across the main thoroughfare, declaring "LISTEN".

4. Conclusion: #SomethingMustRise

Walking out of the Iziko' South African National Gallery in September 2016, an artwork to the left of the exit door caught my eye. It was a photograph of performance art by Sethembile Msezane, a Michaelis student at the time, entitled *Chapungu – The Day Rhodes Fell* (2015). The print depicts a young woman (Msezane) in a black leotard with arms raised, standing on a plinth of her own. From her arms are suspended wing-like appendages, braided with animal hair. Her face is obscured with a beaded headdress. She is immersed in an audience watching the removal of the Rhodes statue, primarily mediated through their cellphone screens. Her performance of raising her wings is timed to coincide with the statue's removal. In this exhibition photograph, the tip of her one wing is juxtaposed to look like as if it is lifting the statue off the plinth. Msezane's performance makes explicit reference to another sculpture, of a Zimbabwean bird, that Rhodes wrongfully appropriated and which today sits on his former estate (Msezane, 2015). *Chapungu* is a photographic collage of time and space.

The artist's statement at Iziko said that the day Rhodes fell was the beginning of disrupting a legacy that celebrates white supremacy within a South African landscape: "This moment captures a process of identity construction, self-assertion and reclamation of space within an African locale that continues to be in flux. It was never just about a statue." Alongside, on this exhibition *Disruption*, was another photograph from the 1960s, taken by Alf Kumalo. It depicts the initiation of a Basotho woman near Evaton. Two striking features resonate with Msezane's work – the woman wears a very similar beaded headdress and her arms are also outstretched, in a frontal gesture.

This kind of collapse of time and space was highlighted by Leigh-Ann Naidoo in a public introduction to the annual Ruth First Memorial Lecture at University of Witwatersrand. She called the students leading *Rhodes Must Fall* time-travellers, "their particular, beautiful madness is to have recognised and exploited the ambivalence of our historical moment to push into the future. They have been working on the project of *historical dissonance*, of clarifying the untenable status quo of the present by forcing an awareness of a time when things are not this way. They have seen things many have yet to see. They have been experimenting with hallucinating a new time" (Naidoo, 2016: 2, original emphasis).

The Rhodes statue removal was about interrupting what appeared to be normal and entering an entirely new cultural moment, according to Achille Mbembe. He told a public audience in Cape Town in 2015 that certain institutional forms of life were not sustainable and interruption was a form of cultural jamming. Respondent Ntone Edjabe went one step further at the same event, making an analogy with the role of the disruptor in Congolese music, a role that allowed the audience to become part of what was going on. Edjabe suggested we had entered a 'Nollywood' era, after the Nigerian cinema phenomenon; in discussion time, this was described as "a cinema in which you and I can become actors".⁴

The void is a radical way of arresting time and invoking something else – something undefined, perhaps, but not business as usual. In this case study, a series of performative artistic gestures, interventions and

⁴ These comments are drawn from a book launch for Mbembe's *On the postcolony* (6 August 2015). Author's notes. Book Lounge, Cape Town.

proposals emerged from a voided plinth to reveal undercurrents of the city's spatial and political histories while re-imagining a different reality. Considering the underlying question in this special issue of whether art contributes to the making of more inclusive, democratic and participatory cities across the world, this article shows how public art and its contestations may help surface issues of race and power, the 'hidden transcripts' of James Scott (1992). Scott also addresses the electricity that can be generated when such transcripts are publicly spoken out. Artworks have the capacity to be carriers of that current. Since its banishment, the disappeared sculpture of Rhodes has been catapulted into public discourse and helped recalibrate the public sphere. This zombie monument has broken into the fourth dimension of performing city futures.

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