

REFLECTIVE ARTICLE

## Grasping the Regimes of Language, Space and Identity in the Visual of Post-apartheid Higher Education in South Africa

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### *Preface*

In 2014, through the University of the Free State's (UFS) Institute for Reconciliation and Social Justice (IRSJ), three South African universities partnered to collaborate on the pilot phase of a research project focused on understanding whether the Arts could enable social cohesion, as the 2012 National Development Plan (2030) had promoted.

The project, which had been conceptualised by one of the authors of this article in early 2014,<sup>1</sup> followed both experience and observation of the challenges with regards this concept in the Arts, Culture and Heritage sectors of South Africa. Subsequent reflection and questioning of some of the related challenges, problematised the role that higher education had in societal transformation, and accordingly, in the conceptual development of social cohesion: Were universities creating appropriate conceptual frameworks and praxes required for the post-apartheid South African context?

The disruption created by the 2008 'Reitz Video' and the UFS's subsequent decision to critically explore the meanings and trajectories thereof as part of the university's transformation process, opened an important space also for the interrogation of concepts like that of 'Arts' and 'Social Cohesion' in South Africa. The 'Reitz Video' when read as a 'Visual', signaled the need to not only understand and address racism more substantively, but also the need to understand the power of the visual in the disruption of outdated social imaginaries and, in the production of what the new social imaginaries could also be.

Research questions around the visual were subsequently set for the pilot phase of the project in 2014. These included firstly, the need to question how social cohesion was thought of and worked with in an African context by emerging and established visual

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artists, and secondly, to ascertain what the broader student and staff populations at these three South African universities (the University of the Free State, Rhodes University<sup>2</sup> and the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University<sup>3</sup>) understood and proposed in terms of the concept of social cohesion at this particular juncture of South Africa's democracy project.

With this research framework, each university set about the project's implementation in 2015, as would be best suited to the needs and context of each institution. Common to the implementation of the project, however, was that each university would develop an exhibition consisting of visual arts-based works reflecting and responding to the research framework; that each university would also host a colloquium on the research question; and that all three universities would document their processes in a joint publication for reflection and development purposes.

Through the IRSJ, the UFS's implementation focused on the exploration of the concept through firstly working with students drawn from across faculties and who would collaborate with third year Fine Arts as well as Drama and Theatre Arts students and secondly; working with professional artists, both those employed by the university as well as those operating in the surrounds of the university. While students of the university were worked with over a period of a semester to reflect on the concept in relation to the context of the university self, the professional artists were asked over the same period of time to think of the concept in terms of the broader Mangaung<sup>4</sup> municipal and South African context through an African epistemological lens. Discussions with regards this conceptual basis of social cohesion with the group was guided by the provision of various scholarly articles, book chapters and thought pieces by a range of African artists and thinkers. The artworks developed by the students and the professional artists were then hosted as part of the IRSJ's Social Justice platform in the second semester of 2015, which was integrated across spaces of the university campus in order to elicit interaction and reflection from as broad an audience as possible.

Rhodes/UCKAR aligned the project to its Office for Equity and Institutional Culture as well as to the Department of Fine Art and implemented the project through a collaboration with Makhanda community-based arts organisations (Fingo Festival and Upstart Youth Development Project), interested Fine Arts students and a group of professional artists working at community level from the Western Cape. Working with school learners from Rhini and Joza,<sup>5</sup> this collaboration resulted in the installation of site specific work located on campus and its surrounds. Partnership with the Nelson Mandela Foundation was also established in order to curate and host a photographic exhibition in the Albany Museum, focused on visualising issues of social justice.

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2 From 2015, Rhodes University has also been referred to as the University Currently Known As Rhodes (UCKAR) as the debate and dialogue around its name take place.

3 From 2017, the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University has been known as the Nelson Mandela University.

4 Mangaung Municipality comprises the Bloemfontein, Botshabelo and Thaba Nchu municipal areas.

5 Township residential areas within Makhanda.

The Nelson Mandela University's School of Music, Art and Design incorporated the project into the workplan of its newly introduced first year Bachelor of Visual Arts programme. Students from across a range of visual arts disciplines collaborated in the production of artworks and texts. In September 2015, the project culminated in a colloquium and an exhibition. These activities served to launch the new art gallery and expanded visual arts facilities on the university's Bird Street Campus.

As became evident through the pilot phase, the various histories and institutional cultures particular to each of these universities would come to influence the project, as would the particular frameworks of change which the student #movements in 2015 were to provide. The findings from the pilot implementation phase of the project were as a result complex and have continued to provide scope for interpretation, thought and use across contexts. With this in mind, our contribution to this journal focuses on representatives from each of the three participating universities engaging in a reflective discussion on what we have learnt so far in terms of how, in particular, the visual works with and intersects higher education and issues of space, language and identity politics in South Africa today in terms of the meta issues of social cohesion and social justice.

Some of the issues raised from our reflections include, firstly, that the visual within the public space, including university campuses, remains as contentious and unresolved as it has over the past two decades of our democracy. Secondly, this lack of cultural advancement has led to young black academics being caught in a particular and precarious form of crossfire. On the one hand they are highly critical of the institutional practices and highly conscious of erasures and amnesias, yet, on the other hand, they are employed in the system. Lastly, the disruption which the visual results in has the potential to change narratives. However, as with the challenges of the visual in the public space, we continue to struggle in finding the language and the will to effect this.

All three authors worked in leading positions in the project in 2015 and through their attempt at explaining the processes and findings of the pilot year of the project at the 2016 South African Art Historians Conference, it was confirmed for themselves that the project, while implemented through the Visual Arts sector in 2015, had findings which needed to be developed and shared with the broader higher education environment as well.

This reflective discussion therefore goes back to the beginning and focuses on each university reflecting on one question, which is framed and guided by key thematic areas drawn from the overall project findings from 2015, and which can be read at the end of the article. This framework, at that particular juncture in time, summarised the social conditions and contingencies which each university had identified as being in need of consideration and work if social cohesion was to be developed within their institutions.

***Keywords:***

*diversity, reconciliation and silence; history, post memory and space; process, politics and pedagogies*

*REFLECTIVE QUESTION: Assuming that the National Development Plan focuses on the arts and their relationship to social cohesion on the understanding that the arts have the ability to ‘encounter’ problems and that through their practices have the power to re-imagine social relationships, we could argue that it is intuitively possible that the arts can be an enabler in the arena of social cohesion. How does this translate to and become integrated into the cultures of university campuses in the post-apartheid space?*

## A) Giselle Baillie: UFS

### *Diversity, Reconciliation and Silence*

#### Diversity

For a university campus where the more recent commissioning of public artworks under the institution’s transformation project has in many ways been to counterbalance, reposition and problematise the ‘Old’ (Read: Apartheid histories, statues, memorials, architecture, spatial complexities) with the ‘New’ (read: Constitutional Democracy); a response to this question until more recently would very likely have been to the affirmative, in that public artworks do enable social cohesion. This response would more than likely also have been premised on the notion that wherever the artworks were displayed, that they could be read in the post-apartheid conceptual framework and discourse which promoted diversity, reconciliation, tolerance, respect for difference and, social cohesion (UFS, n.d; Schmahmann, 2013, 2015). Also implicitly factored into this claim would be the understanding that the visual language promoted by these artworks would be accessible, meaningful to and accepted by all communities and identities engaging with the university (ibid).

What was raised by the 2015 #RhodesMustFall (here after referred to as #RMF) movement however, was the explicit rejection of this conceptual framework, its language and its meanings on public university campuses. This rejection however was not isolated and neither did it relate only to the issue of statues or to South African public university campuses for that matter. Parallel to the #RMF drive in getting the Rhodes statue moved off the University of Cape Town’s campus, was a similar project in the broader South African public space spearheaded by members of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) and also the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) and, which focused on the removal of pre-democracy ‘Colonial and Boer [Afrikaner]’ public monuments and statues. Amongst the reasons provided by the aforementioned political parties was their frustration with the lack of socio-economic change in the post-Apartheid South African society and therefore the need to ‘cleanse society’ of all symbols and social imaginations which hurt and hampered development (see, for example, Independent Online, 2015).

While vested with a new form of urgency, given the media’s intense focus on the matter, at face value it seemed that these forms of rejection mirrored those which had been ongoing since the late 1990s in South Africa as the heritage landscape underwent

transformation processes.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, the #RMF rejections were soon to be located into the framework of historical narrative, identity, politics and power contestation with the accompanying conceptual framework of heritage contestation management soon following. Since 1994, and in recognition of the oppressive symbolism which certain objects were imbued with – statues, artworks and visual reminders of apartheid leaders such as Hendrik Verwoerd were removed from their original positions and contexts in the public space, supposedly to be banished to storage or alternately to be re-contextualised for critical public engagement in a new ‘museum’ or ‘heritage’ context or setup (Coombes, 2004; Dubin, 2009). The broader public art landscape, including objects relating to British and Afrikaner histories, however, were to remain in the public space to be utilised for reconciliation processes through the dialogues which the inclusion of additional public artworks, focused on the narratives of Black historical figures and events, would purportedly enable. This ‘dialectical relationship’, it was proposed, would elicit the development of critical public dialogue and a public philosophy towards constitutional realisation and citizenship development.

However, as could be witnessed over the past two and a half decades of South Africa’s democracy, the conceptual development needed within the public space and in the heritage sector to equitably deal with the related historical, cultural, racial and discriminatory trauma and hurt (see for example Moodley, 2014) which these colonial and apartheid objects evoked, was limited. As a result, even though new public artworks were commissioned and dialogues in relation to the heritage transformation process were called for or attempted, limited philosophical progression at ground level and at executive level seemed to take place. What was removed from the public space usually ended up being purposefully forgotten in some obscure and out of the way dark room or repositioned into different meanings in spheres of private language and heritage practice related to specific identity interests. Alternately, what was proposed for inclusion into these spaces in order to problematise the old, would either not be realised or, alternately, marginalised owing to various other socio-political factors at play (Coombes, 2004; Dubin, 2009; Miller, 2017).

Hence, when this discourse again became foregrounded in 2015 through the #RMF movement, and given the continued lack of conceptual, linguistic and political framework development to deal with the challenges it foregrounded, initial proposals raised by a national working group established by the Minister for Arts and Culture again focused

6 Prior to South Africa’s democracy, heritage, like all other realms of the South African reality, was governed by the principles of segregation and ‘own development’. Segregated museums were established for the white population in towns and cities to present particular narratives of history and to uphold the white imagination of racial, cultural and intellectual superiority. The principle of ‘own development’ was employed in the previous ethnically segregated homelands of apartheid South Africa, focusing on ethnic cultural development and usually through the establishment of ‘ethnic-based cultural institutions’ where only one language and its related cultural practices would find the space for development. The process of creating new shared narratives, new shared histories, shared spatial frameworks and so forth from this previously segregated reality, would and has continued to prove challenging in democratic South Africa. Rather than being able to create a shared historical and heritage framework, contestations seemed instead to focus around whose narrative was being promoted in most instances of heritage transformation debate since 1994.

on 'solutions'. These included placing the statues in a special 'Statue/Memorial Park', alternatively placing these 'offensive' statues in a museum or heritage site in order to re-contextualise them, or placing them in storage, with the unspoken knowledge that this would once again lead to the temporary salve of silencing and shelving of the conundrum (see for example, Mthethwa, 2015). The public space and the heritage sector it seemed had no new praxes to the conundrum. But was it an issue which only the heritage sector should address?

In February 2008, the UFS found itself faced with its most critical public-visual-witnessing moment when the video produced for an internal residence cultural competition went viral, globally. Focused on expressing rejection of the university's 2007 forced residence racial integration policy, four young white male and Afrikaans-speaking students, through the adoption and use of the *Fear Factor* television show format as storyline shaper, created a video narrating their rejection of racial integration. Through this register, the five black university workers they had co-opted into acting out the 'Fear Factor' competition storyline would show how 'different' they were by 'playing the game' through a set of challenges which evoked elements of the cultural hazing practices traditionally employed by UFS residences. These included testing the ability of the participants to consume food dishes concocted to induce vomiting, to consume large quantities of alcohol and then to perform particular dance movements; to present their 'identity' at the residence bar through the utilisation of language registers particular to the Reitz residence and, to successfully compete in an obstacle-based athletic competition (Van der Merwe & Van Reenen, 2016, pp. 9-23).

This visual interpretation, which won the Reitz Residence cultural competition in the previous year, became so much more than what students had supposedly intended it to be. Rather, like public statues and other visuals in plural or diverse identity South Africa, this video hosted meanings and powers beyond those of the supposed intentions of its producers and its custodians, and beyond those of the communities they were located in. Rather than remaining an 'innocent spoof', as the students and their families would claim (ibid.); the video and its after-images were read and utilised along a trajectory of different meanings. For many black people in South Africa and globally, the video represented the arrogance underpinning the racism of many white people and the continued ignorance of the hurt caused by racism. For many black and some white UFS students, past and present, the video took on meanings aligned to the subtle aggressions, discrimination and injustices which these students had for years articulated as taking place at the university, but who could seldom provide visual evidence thereof. For gender-interest groups, the video represented not only racism, but also the continued arrogance of patriarchy and sexism in society. For the workers in the video and for their families, the video took on meanings of shame and embarrassment as members of their own communities ridiculed them for supposedly having been 'duped' by these students (UFS Media Archives, 2008). Although produced by the four students and not the university, and even though the university publically condemned the video and apologised for the hurt it had created, for many of the publics (after Habermas) it remains symbolic of the university's alleged continued racism,

with its visual power lingering deeply in the social imagination of the injustices, which black South Africans foreground as continuing in the democratic space.

In 2015, and aligned to the #RMF movements, the UFS was once again faced with a critical social cohesion and social justice question in the public sphere, with its roots once again in the visual. Should the UFS, as it had initiated in 2009, continue in its attempt to reconcile the university community to the underlying premises of the Constitution in order to re-imagine and re-build the university community and broader society, or should the University forego promoting its conceptual understanding of reconciliation, democracy and transformation and allow what was considered 'oppressive' by students (various public artworks on the campus) to be removed instead?<sup>7</sup> In February 2016, students decided for the University.

### Reconciliation

*"To imagine a language means to imagine a form of life" (Wittgenstein, 1953, p. 8)*

When the new vice-chancellor of the UFS, Professor Jonathan Jansen, announced in his inauguration speech in October 2009 that the university would still proceed with criminal charges against the four students who had produced the 'Reitz Video', but that the university would also forgive the four students and allow them to complete their studies, and that he, the university and society should recognise their complicity in providing the environment in which such racist and unjust behaviour could take place and as such accept responsibility and study and develop new, critical praxes of reconciliation, the backlash from the black South African public was significant. Why, they asked, should black people continue to forgive white people for their continued racism, for their continued exclusion of the black person from spaces and opportunities, for their continued lack of remorse? As contended by countless opinions expressed on the 'Reitz Video' matter in the media, those four white students needed to be punished and removed if anything was ever to change. Jansen's proposed and publicly mis-read 'racial reconciliation', like that of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC), was an 'insult' to black people, writers and thinkers like Pumla Gqola inferred (2009).

The decision to utilise 'Reconciliation' as a key operational principle in the UFS's proposed societal transformation project, however, went ahead. In assisting the UFS as well as its broader communities to 'read' this transformation and societal development principle in action, significant changes were made to the University's motto, its insignia, its vision and mission, its public art project, its academic project and to its strategies amongst others

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7 Since approximately 2003, the UFS had undertaken discussions and actions in dealing with apartheid-era statues, names and artworks on the Bloemfontein campus. Following the success of an application made around 2007, a set of new public artworks was commissioned from 2009 until 2011 through funds from the National Lottery Commission to exist in relationship to the 'Old'. Further, the removal in many residences of apartheid-era and discriminatory signs, artworks and symbols was also undertaken. From 2013, the UFS had similarly been attempting to work with the Students Representative Council (SRC) in identifying new names for buildings, as well as the re-positioning/interpretation of public artworks. A critical breakdown in this process, however, seems to have taken place.

(UFS Media, 2009-2014). As stated to the media, the UFS would become a world leader in the praxes of reconciliation. However, as would be consistently raised and witnessed via the various media articles and visuals captured or created on alleged racial incidents taking place at the UFS over the period from 2010 to 2015 (see, for example, YouTube, 2014); by supposedly not punishing and removing the initial 'problem' that related to the 'Reitz Video' in 2007/8; the university assumedly continued to protect and support white Afrikaans culture and in doing so, continued to allegedly allow white superiority, racism and oppression to manifest unhindered. No matter how the UFS attempted to visually and conceptually re-imagine itself, the imprint of the visuals and meanings from the Reitz video and also from other prior and subsequent alleged racist incidents at the University seemed to find more traction in the student imaginative space.

Then, on 22 February 2016, almost eight years to the day from when the 'Reitz Video' had initially gone viral globally, images and digital footage of white rugby supporters beating up protesting black UFS students and black staff trying to resolve the impasse, also went viral. Within twenty-four hours, the C.R. Swart statue<sup>8</sup> on the UFS campus was removed from its plinth by a group of EFF-linked members and students, and dumped into the pool outside the UFS Law Faculty buildings. Five months later, an Afrikaans-focused interest group, the Voortrekkers, applied to the provincial heritage authority for permission to remove the statue from storage at the UFS campus in order to install it on a farm near Lindley in the Free State, which was being used to educate young Afrikaners about 'their' history and heritage. The C.R. Swart statue, which like other statues had not been removed from the Bloemfontein campus but had been joined by other works to foster dialectical relationships as part of the university's reconciliation frame, seemed to prove once again that the 'dialectical relationship theory' was limited.

## Silence

As was articulated in the 2015 project publication, a publication that explored the findings put forward by the project across all three universities at that time, for the arts to enable social cohesion, conceptual clarification in relation to how social cohesion needs to be thought of in the post-apartheid plural South African context, what it is meant to/projected to achieve, and what support structures and discourses were needed to enable this, were in dire need. Without this clarification, the visual arts, in particular, would continue to kick up dust and create festering wounds around the concept on university campuses and in the public space.

Two threads of silence therefore shape and inform my current thinking with regard to the question. Firstly, given that the 2015 project focused on the visual arts, and as such this

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8 The statue of Charles Robert Swart was installed on the UFS campus in 1993, in front of the Law Faculty buildings. C.R. Swart was the first State President of the Republic of South Africa (1961-1967). Prior to this, he was last Governor General of the Union of South Africa under whose watch many of the discriminatory laws of Apartheid South Africa were legalised. For more on the statue, see Miller and Schmahmann, 2017.



answer needs to shape my thinking to that particular art form, the visual and the public arts do have the ability to encounter or raise problems, but, as has also been evidenced through numerous examples from South Africa since 1994 – ignorance, subversion or avoidance of the political agency (aisthesis, after Rancière, 2004) in favour of the ‘aesthetic’ of the artwork usually ends up silencing and frustrating the potential language, interstices and re-imagination the visual should initiate. As would be seen through the #FMF movements, and since then, as universities have attempted to grapple with public art issues; contestation over whether the historical value or the aesthetic value of an artwork carries more weight than its political agency, obscures and silences the power that the visual could have in the social re-imagination process.

Secondly, as is the case with the UFS and its attempts at problematising ‘Reconciliation’ – when attempts are made to put in place frameworks and interventions to locate and develop new imaginations around the visual – in the conflicted space which the South African historical past creates, social cohesion is not about relationships of consensual dialogue, but is rather that of continuous productive contestation, given the plural and highly complex society that South Africa is.

## **B) Zamansele Nsele: Rhodes/UCKAR**

### *History, Post Memory and Space*

The issues that were raised at the dialogues culminated in a student-led colloquium on art and social justice. A variety of papers were presented by students and they coalesced around an amalgam of themes pertaining to the complicated status of Rhodes University in the institutional post-apartheid landscape. What emerged as the most immediate issue at the colloquium was the institutional project of memory as represented by the contested signifier<sup>9</sup> of Cecil John Rhodes, as is still carried by the name Rhodes University (UCKAR). What I have written below is a meditation on the signifier of Cecil John Rhodes and the implications that this signification bears on the physical built space that is still called ‘Rhodes University’ or the ‘University Currently Known As Rhodes’ post-#RME.

### **What is remembered, who remembers it, and how is it remembered?**

Memory is a fragile and faulty device that is driven by desire and imagination. We use memory not to remember, how things were, but rather to remember things the way we want them to be. It follows then that imagination and memory are bedfellows. Ricouer (2004) writes that if memory and imagination are two affections that are always in the company of one another, then “to evoke one to imagine it, is to evoke the other to remember it” Ricouer (2004). Now, within this mnemonic structure of desire, imagination and memory, what do we make of the institutional memory that commands the university

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9 This issue of name change followed from the removal of the Rhodes statue that previously stood erect as an extension of UCT campus (University of Cape Town).

apparatus? Here I use the term ‘institutional memory’ as shorthand to refer to institutional patterns and institutional cultures that are cultivated as everyday norms that reinforce whiteness in historically white university spaces. Such norms reinforce the comfort of white bodies, in the sense that white bodies in these spaces of higher learning are in the words of Sara Ahmed “bodies-at-home”. Ahmed<sup>10</sup> refers to institutions as spaces that are historically prepared and readied to receive and enable white bodies. The somatic difference represented by black bodies manifests the opposite effect – discomfort. Consequently, one can confidently expand from the premise that black South Africans who have gone through a ‘previously white university’ system know that it is a painstaking journey characterised by varying degrees of humiliation and alienation. This journey is akin to the one outlined by Ngugi (1986) in his tome, *Decolonising the Mind*, where he sheds light on the pathological effects of colonial alienation. What is touted as a path out of poverty – university education – for poor black South Africans is a double-edged sword that can cut both ways. It is a journey that alienates oneself from oneself and this alienation extends to one’s family, community and towards Africa in general.

### **What does it mean to grow up in the places and spaces of history which are not your own?**

The question above was posed during the Art & Social Justice colloquium, and I use it as a conceptual guide in my response as it links a series of pertinent questions raised by Zine Magubane (2004) in the text *Hear Our Voices*, and they are as follows:

1. For what and for whom were these universities created?
2. From their inception, what have the social functions of these universities been?

In order to attend to these questions, Magubane agitates that we go back in time to trace the lineage linking universities, especially English-medium universities, to the mining industry. Magubane (2004, p. 44) points out the following:

The history of mining magnates whose ill-gotten gains played such a central role in providing the financial bequests that underwrote the establishment of South Africa’s most prominent universities is a damning one.

Cecil John Rhodes is a major actor in southern African colonial history; he unapologetically dominates the imperial stage. He looms large as one of the mining magnates that Magubane speaks of in the above passage. His image can be productively analysed as a quintessential representation of imperial heroism. It was the Rhodes Trust that bequeathed the funds to

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10 According to Sarah Ahmed, the institutionalisation of whiteness involves work: the institution comes to have a body as an effect of this work. With this in mind, she urges us not to reify institutions by presuming they are simply given and that they decide what we do. Rather, Ahmed suggests that institutions become given, as an effect of the repetition of decisions made over time. Institutions involve the accumulation of past decisions about how to allocate resources, as well as ‘who’ to recruit.

establish a university bearing his name in Grahamstown<sup>11</sup> in 1904, Rhodes University. Magubane argues that the institutional memory of Cecil John Rhodes is strategically an amnesiac one. I propose that it speaks of much more than just a selective institutional memory practice. The whitewashing<sup>12</sup> is indicative of an ominous type of memory practice that is in the form of imperial nostalgia. Imperial nostalgia regards colonialism as a “one-way flow of charity and benevolence from the European to the African” and, therefore, words of gratitude are expected from Africans in return (Reilly, 2016). From this standpoint, colonialism is a gift that bestows civilisation where there was none, echoing the myth of the white man’s burden.<sup>13</sup> Put differently from this purview, colonialism equals civilisation.<sup>14</sup> Herein lies the violence of nostalgia’s sentimentalism, as by its own internal logic it is a form of remembering that effaces all the inconvenient bits, i.e. violence and plunder. For its own gains this memory practice removes the inconvenient truths about the past. Modernity and its underside, coloniality, coalesce upon a fundamental organising principle and that is abject violence, but this aspect is often muted and ignored by those afflicted by this form of sentimental longing. Imperial nostalgia further strategically omits the fact that modern civilisation depends precisely on what it chooses not to acknowledge: black abjection. Institutional memory practice is consistent with this pattern of remembering whereby the image of Cecil John Rhodes is “tightly edited” in order to play down his flagrant hatred towards “natives” and this effectively conceals his conspicuous zeal for white supremacy<sup>15</sup> (Magubane in Reilly, 2016, p. 78). In recent history, that is in post-apartheid history, the pattern is not broken. In a paper presented by Siseko Kumalo (2015) at the colloquium, he highlighted Rhodes University’s (institutional) silence on Marikana, and pointed out the negligence in acknowledging and remembering the lives lost during the Marikana massacre in 2012. What makes this institutional silence conspicuous is that the anniversary of Marikana on 11 August fell on the weekend of intervarsity, which was hosted by Rhodes University at the time. Little to nothing was done by the institution to note the importance of this fateful day. Kumalo (2015) expands on this:

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11 Renamed ‘Makhanda’ in 2018.

12 Bernard Magubane in Joseph Reilly’s (2016) *Teaching the ‘Native’*, notes the deliberate effort not only to whitewash the deeds of Cecil John Rhodes but to further whitewash his words in liberal history. Magubane (in Reilly) further points out that Cecil John Rhodes’ will from where his scholarship was established was heavily abridged, “savagely censored”. As a result this effectively denies contemporary readers open access to CJR’s imperial vision.

13 *The White Man’s Burden* is the title of a poem written by Rudyard Kipling in 1899. In the poem, Kipling urges America to righteously assume imperial control over the Philippine islands. Consequently, the term has come to signify the justification of imperialism as a moral obligation on the part of the Europeans to uplift and civilise blacks and people of colour.

14 This notion has recently been subject to public debate following the tweets of the premier of the Western Cape, Helen Zille, where she lists the positive outcomes of colonialism. This suggests that South Africans, even at the level of leadership, have not come to a consensus about colonialism and apartheid as irredeemable abominations.

15 The native is to be treated as a child and denied the franchise. We must adopt a system of despotism in our relations with the barbarians of South Africa. I prefer land to niggers. <http://www.2oceansvibe.com/2015/03/23/i-prefer-land-to-niggers-and-more-choice-quotes-from-cecil-john-rhodes/#ixzz4jGTykyU9>

With students claiming affinity with the working class population there is no surprise that on the morning of the Marikana anniversary, after a weekend of debauchery masked by the assertion of celebrating sporting excellence, through the intervarsity tournament which was hosted by Rhodes University this year, we woke up to an institution whose administration block was drenched in red spray paint with 'Marikana' placed strategically in defiance of the blatant silencing of what was termed 'Black Pain'.

In this pattern, post-apartheid institutions such as Rhodes University are seen as complicit in the fundamental lack of formally registering the precariousness of black lives in post-apartheid South Africa. In its epistemological frame this aspect of erasure was discussed in *Bantu-Staan!*, a paper presented by Sikhumbuzo Makandula (2015). To regard history from this perspective affirms the logic of epistemicide. Put in another way, it speaks to the necessary distortion and devaluing of indigenous (non-Europeans') forms of knowing and being in the world. Colonial epistemicide has occurred on all disciplinary levels including the visual. Up until the #RMF student protests, when the Rhodes statue was physically removed, Cecil John Rhodes had been (and arguably still is) institutionally regarded less as a racist imperialist and more as a magnanimous philanthropist, his name being synonymous with prestige and academic excellence as embodied by the Mandela-Rhodes Scholarship.<sup>16</sup> The legacy of Cecil John Rhodes is by no stretch of the imagination, from this perspective, a symbol<sup>17</sup> of benevolence; it is a gift that keeps on giving even in the post-apartheid future in 2017.<sup>18</sup>

### **On space, post-memory and the political nature of visibility in post-apartheid South Africa**

Spatiality and visibility in their various intersections are domains that are not value-free and nor are they separate from ideology and politics. Rhodes University is like many institutions in South Africa which have been formally structured by the divides of apartheid. It is an institution that can be understood as a spatial site and as a visual sight of identification and resistance. Additionally, one's experience of its administrative and cultural practices as a whole creates an overall sense of either belonging or non-belonging in the space. In the case of 'non-belongers' there is nearly always a sticky feeling that one

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16 See the online article, 'Feasibility of Rhodes University name change to be studied'. <http://ewn.co.za/2015/07/31/Task-team-set-for-Rhodes-University-proposed-name-change> [Retrieved on 7 June 2017].

17 The most prominent signifiers of Cecil John Rhodes' legacy have lived in the realm of visibility. For instance, it was the eventual removal of the statue that opened up space for a public discourse on decoloniality to ensue. The removal of his statue subsequently invited debate and scrutiny over the name of Rhodes University and the urgent need to change it. The public call for renaming has been largely student led, and it squares against the desires of an invested alumni, to whom such a change would affect the brand value of the institution, denoting a lowering of standards.

18 It is not surprising, then, that anti-#RMF rhetoric relies on this type of thought pattern. #RMF leaders, such as Sbo Qwabe who is a recipient of the Rhodes scholarship, were often painted as irrational ingrates for their critique and protest against discriminatory practices in university spaces.

has to conform to a way of doing things or saying things or appearing in a prescribed way in order to fit in and eventually arrive at the destination of 'home' in the space. These experiences are not exclusively shaped by race, as class, one's gender and sexual orientation further contaminate the experience of not belonging. For instance, at Rhodes University, to speak with a detectable 'Model C' accent carries a dominant social and cultural capital that would enable the speaker to be welcomed and to 'feel at home'. Within the same vein the repeated discomfiture of hearing one's name repeatedly mispronounced has led to an informal culture of predominantly black students that either change or shorten their names as a method of assimilating into a space that is not yet ready to receive their arrival. This brings to mind Sara Ahmed's discussion where she unpacks the structural privilege of those who are vested with the comfort of playing hosts in such institutions; she speaks of "those who are at home in the space, the ones who are welcoming rather than welcomed". The unhomely shadow that follows black bodies around in these spaces is a long one that cannot simply be overcome through admission and recruitment policies.

### C) Mary Duker: NMU

#### *Process, Politics and Pedagogies: Considering the Way Forward*

##### **The 2015 Project**

The invitation from the IRSJ to partner with them and Rhodes/UCKAR in the 2015 project came at an opportune time. This was the year in which Nelson Mandela University's Department of Visual Arts introduced its Bachelor of Visual Arts (BVA) qualification. Because the programme was in its very first iteration, there were no pre-existing, fixed, cast-in-stone sets of curricular 'traditions' to uphold, and there was a degree of flexibility possible with regard to the work plan and the timetable. The lecturers who would be presenting the newly minted studio modules expressed a willingness to engage the first cohort of BVA students in a collective and embodied art-making project focused on the visual expression of 'African' identities. We mapped out a timeframe, with the work produced in the project destined for a high-profile institutionally supported exhibition, accompanied by a colloquium. The studio exploration would focus on the re-imagining of social relationships while the colloquium, with its presenters drawn from the ranks of both the visual arts and the social sciences, and including practitioners and theorists, artists, curators and student activists, would probe the gaps in the social cohesion narrative.

The project was conceptualised and planned very early in 2015, and the studio aspect commenced just prior to the date that the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at the University of Cape Town was removed from its plinth as an outcome of the #RhodesMustFall protests. Shortly after the exhibition and colloquium in October, the national #FeesMustFall protests gained momentum. Looking back, the heated discussion that informed and helped to shape the studio project, and the content addressed by the colloquium presenters, appears both timeous and prescient.

## Bringing the ‘outside’ inside

We envisaged the project in its entirety, both the studio and the colloquium aspects, as a boundary-crosser, one that could bring theory and practice closer together, but more importantly, one that could bring the ‘realities’ of the outside world into the possibly over-protected disciplinary ‘safe’ space of the first-year programme. Nathan Harter (2016, p. x) points out that reality itself is anything but stable, certain, simple and dis-ambiguous, and using the military acronym ‘VUCA’, he suggests that it is more likely to be a liminal space – one that is volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. With this project we set out to invite ‘VUCA’ into the studios and lecture halls.

## So what ‘truths’ emerged in the studio?

The studio engagement proved to be challenging. I realise that while my colleagues remained committed to seeing the project through, they experienced a great unease when the collective conceptualising and making process became messy and tense and the conversation shifted, moving away from the comfortable space of ‘rainbow-ism’ and towards the edgier space of ‘emancipation’, with black students speaking their truths about identity politics, about fitting in and about feeling silenced in a learning environment dominated by ‘whiteness’.

This speaking out in the open space of the studios was new. Amongst my colleagues, some were discomfited by the levels of emotional intensity. There were earnest attempts at brokering discussion around silencing and voice and marginalisation, most of which fell to me and the head of department to facilitate. In the end we ended up with a very fetching set of works which looked good *wwsqqsqqwand* which complemented the institutional narratives around *Respect for Diversity* and *Ubuntu* very well.

For me, looking back reflexively, it is not in these finessed end products that the strength and relevance of the engagement lies. Rather, the significance is to be found in the conversations, with all their awkward disjoints and their [mis]-understandings, and the potential for future engagements is to be found in the performative aspects of the shared and often painful collective art-making processes.

Writing about the “material thinking” and “handling” that underpins performative practice, Barbara Bolt suggests that, “Handling as care produces a crucial moment of understanding or circumspection” and that “...it is material thinking, rather than the completed artwork, that is the work of art” (2006, p. 5).

In her text on performativity, handling, and art practice as transformative therapeutics, Lorna Collins suggests that art-making serves as an emancipatory way of making sense of the world (2014, p. 122). Viewed through the lens of Collins’ theorising, and following her train of thought, the collective-making process has the potential to serve as “... a reparative act, one that addresses loss, pain and suffering...” (2014, p. 228) and, one that may “... help to resolve the struggle between anxieties and aggression...” (2014, p. 197).

### What 'truths' emerged in the colloquium?

The colloquium that we presented later in the year was intended to be an uncomfortable space, and it served its purpose. The presenters were invited to grapple with a set of questions that had emerged as the outcome of the studio project, viewed from their own disciplinary perspectives:

- Is culture a fixed entity and, if not, who controls its changes?
- Who can lay claim to being 'African'?
- How does the individual fit into the group?
- Who can talk for whom?
- Whose voice is being silenced?
- What are the power relations?
- What are the 'rules of engagement'?
- How do young creative artists position themselves, and how do all of these discussions take place – who facilitates them and in what framework?

There was vigorous engagement between the audience and the presenters, one that served to challenge certainties and call into question assumptions. What stands out when viewing the recorded footage of the event are the completely different worldviews (the 'alternative truths', to borrow a phrase, that have entered the popular lexicon in recent months), that were brought into the room by the largely student audience. What was articulated in the conversations with the presenters was not 'just' a 'simple' bi-polar black-white divide, although race was clearly foregrounded as a central issue. What was articulated were vastly different constructions of reality, ones that spoke to the socio-political optics, to the lenses through which students view themselves and the world(s) in which they live. I was reminded of Mahmood Mamdani's prescient and pessimistic words in *Beyond Racism: Race and Inequality in Brazil, South Africa and the United States* (Hamilton, 2001). Writing as a respondent to a chapter by Neville Alexander that addresses the prospects for a non-racial South Africa, Mamdani forecast the likelihood of an "impending clash between rainbow-ism and nationalism", between an embrace of inherited inequalities and a mobilisation against it, between "Reconciliation" ideology and "Renaissance" ideology (2001, p. 495). The sounds of that clash reverberated around in our venue.

### So what was the 'take-away'?

In subsequent corridor conversations with individual students from the 2015 cohort, who by now are in their final undergraduate year, I have received mixed feedback – there appears to be a very strong consensus that the whole robust process of engagement and art-making had been significant and meaningful to the student participators, and that projects such as this one, projects that provide collective opportunities to address the realities of the 'world outside the building' are invaluable, and should be included in the curriculum and in the annual studio and theoretical work plans. There are, however, different opinions regarding whether first years are 'ready' for 'challenging' projects so early in their studies, with some students and lecturers maintaining that such uneasiness of content is best grappled with

in the second and third years of study. As an extension of that train of thought, there are differing levels of comfort with the concept of working collectively. Why not, as the question was posed by a commentator, allow people to express their own ideas about where they fit in, and what their understanding of the nature of our diverse society is? Why be required to engage with others as they do this?

It is telling of exactly that desire to avoid the discomfort that comes with grappling with potentially explosive issues in a group setting that, during the departmental planning for the 2016 first-year studio work plan, it was established that the timetable could simply not support the inclusion of a similar 'group', 'outside' and 'difficult' project. Ironically, as fate would have it, the 2016 programme was disrupted by the resurgent #FeesMustFall protests, and in the end reality, the 'outside' and 'difficult' world, did indeed intrude into the sheltered space of the programme.

### **So where to now? What needs to be put in place to revive our project?**

Our 2015 project was delivered within the framework of an innovative new curriculum, one that was drafted as a response to calls for pedagogical transformation. We made use of arts-based methodologies, and we extended the reach of our teaching and learning approach. Our project was hailed as a success, despite it having caused discomfort and unease amongst some colleagues and students. Yet, there was no noticeable appetite from my colleagues to build on it in 2016 or 2017.

If so-called 'difficult' projects are ever to form a regular, ongoing and robust part of the teaching programme, if we want to bring the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous 'outside' world into the studios and seminar rooms in any kind of collective, robust and potentially confrontational way, whether as a pedagogical tool, a means of foregrounding social-political issues, or as a catalyst as we seek to re-imagine social relationships and work towards social change, we must ask what support measures need to be put in place, and we must consider how we can increase our collective appetite for 'discomfort'. I cannot be alone in posing these questions. Institutions are under pressure to transform. Disciplines are under pressure to listen to the student voice, and to explore ways to acknowledge and foreground the exploration of student identities within the curriculum. It is not supposed to be business as usual. It would doubtless be helpful if there were a framework of support in the form of counsellors and facilitators, conflict management specialists and teaching and learning professionals, that we could call upon for advice, as we set out to explore 'VUCA' spaces within the curriculum. This is a conversation that we need to have with our institution(s).

More importantly, these are conversations that need to be held within the department, between ourselves and with our students. For us as academics, perhaps our point of departure could be the acknowledgment of our own "learned ignorance" (De Sousa Santos, 2009, pp. 103-125), an acknowledgement of what we do not know and understand about the world outside our buildings, a recognition of the different kinds of knowledge that students bring with them into the disciplinary community, and an awareness of the limits of our own understanding of the student experience within the department.



### **Update: 2018-2019**

In 2018 and 2019, there were signs of a turning of the tide. The collective engagement with the socio-political and the world outside the university was revisited. Theory and studio lecturers worked together to facilitate an experimental collaborative project which saw senior Bachelor of Visual Arts (BVA) students working in transdisciplinary collectives. In 2018, the groups explored key themes, including History, (Post)Memory and Re-enactment that emerged from visiting artist Nomusa Makhubu's exhibition, *Intertwined 2005-2017* (which was on view at Nelson Mandela University's Bird Street Gallery at the time). In 2019, Sethembile Msizane took up a short residency and, after an intensive and emotive workshop process, transdisciplinary collectives of senior students produced works in which they explored the performativity of individual and group identity in an engagement with the innercity area around the campus. However, the BVA first years have yet to participate in these new generation collaborations. This is a work in progress.

### ***Postscript: 2019 and Towards some Conclusions for This Reflective Article, at This Time and in This Space***

This article will possibly be printed in 2019, two years post the initial reflection informing it, four years post the pilot phase of the project's implementation, and five years post the project's initial conceptualisation. Over this period of time and space, some things have changed, and others have largely remained the same.

Following consistent demands by the Students Representative Council (SRC) at the UFS in 2016 and early 2017, the University entered into a process of broad consultation, informed by national heritage legislation regarding the future of one of the public artworks of the Bloemfontein campus, the M.T. Steyn statue: should this statue be relocated to another position on the campus or should it be removed to a site off campus. Aligned to the University's Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP), which was launched in 2017, this process (UFS, 2018) remains ongoing at the time of this conclusion in July 2019. Although perhaps having more content informing, shaping and driving the related arguments, interest groups involved in the public consultation process (as aligned to the national heritage legislation) regarding the relocation or removal of the statue remain essentially located in the politics of opposition. These, in turn, largely replicate the framework of contestation used over the past 25 years of democracy in South Africa. In this modality, none of the parties involved in the argument actually 'wins' and, as such, the understanding that public artworks such as statues are able to elicit dialogue and a philosophy towards the development of shared objectives, social cohesion and so forth, once again seems challenged in the current heritage framework. Following a process of public consultation over the period 2015-2016, the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) also released its recommendations on the broader transformation of the heritage landscape (DAC, 2018). In the report, DAC motivates the removal of colonial and apartheid statues, and the installation of statues symbolising South Africa and the governing party's democratic ideals. Silence at the conceptual and operational levels of 'statues and social cohesion' persists.

In her 2017 reflection on the project, Zamansele Nsele raises the issue of how public art on university campuses in South Africa are framed by the notions of ‘whitewashing’, underpinned by the deliberate obscuring, avoidance and institutional silencing of the histories of these artworks and of the institutions themselves. Although the previous University of Cape Town (UCT, 2017) and the ongoing UFS public artwork processes have resulted in the creation of what are currently narrow and very difficult inroads into this interrogation, societal transformation remains conceptually confronted and silenced by the intangible phenomenon and power of ‘whitewashing’. From what has been evidenced to date in many of the arguments put forth into the public space over the past three years, it seems that this ‘whitewashing’ is also being informed and underpinned by the Western canon wherein the perceived aesthetic value of the artwork is promoted and defended above the consideration of its agency within social transformation.

As part of her reflection of the project dialogues around social cohesion, which took place at NMU in 2015 and which raised the reality of the highly complex pluralism existent in university communities and hence the limitations of consensus seeking, Mary Duker’s promotion of these difficult and philosophically-framed, open-ended discussions and related institutional development processes being nonetheless necessary to continue, remains relevant today. What Duker’s observations raise also returns us to one of the original questions of this research project: As universities have historically been identified as the vanguard of the development of new societal concepts and social transformation processes through the Arts and if currently, rather than creating new languages and meanings, they seem to be frozen in the regimes of silences, ‘whitewashing’, fear of confrontation and the challenging legislative framework of public art and social cohesion or, alternately, education and social cohesion (Department of Education, 2008), then continued deep interrogation and disruption of the current ‘social cohesion’ concept within the higher education and public context of South Africa remain as salient as ever. Perhaps central to this is the need to critically interrogate the current premise of ‘social cohesion’ in diverse and irreconcilable contexts as South Africa is, before the concept becomes totally enmeshed as an empty signifier in both the higher education and public social imaginaries.

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**APPENDIX: Our State of Affairs 2015**

University of the Free State	Rhodes University	Nelson Mandela University
<p><i>Language, Power, Reconciliation, Agonism:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we understand, trust and work with each other as human beings when we do not speak a common language?</li> <li>• The younger generation and the older generation have very different approaches and meanings ascribed to words, terms, concepts and their meanings. This is where a breakdown between the generations also happens. How do we work with this?</li> <li>• How do we 'unlearn' ourselves, our prejudices, our privileges, our stereotypes?</li> <li>• Our histories, our identities and our meanings are tied up in a private language which we carry forward as individuals, families, groupings and communities. Making sense of and being able to reason and articulate this private language in a framework of Agonism is difficult, so how do we do it?</li> </ul> <p><i>History, Legitimacy and Thresholds:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is our truth or truths and which generation values what, why and how? How do we work through our silences, distrust and confusion?</li> <li>• What is our common history? Could we have one and could this be shaped without distortions and silences? What would this look and feel like? From which epistemic foundation/s do we create this?</li> <li>• How do we use the current as a threshold into a combined future?</li> </ul> <p><i>Process:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does our educational framework fit our social and development objectives? Is the manner in which our studies are held conducive to the kind of society envisioned in the National Development Plan, for example?</li> <li>• Students want to be stakeholders in their education, not bystanders. How do we enable this?</li> </ul>	<p><i>History, PostMemory, Space, Diversity:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is remembered, who remembers it, why is it remembered and how is it remembered?</li> <li>• The psychology of PostMemory defines the aftermath of trauma through the connections and discontinuities between generations.</li> <li>• What does it mean to grow up in a place and spaces of history which are not your own? Spaces are not neutral and are complicit in the enforcement of unknown and rejected histories – how do we interrogate this?</li> <li>• We seem confused with regard to issues of 'Diversity'. What do we want it to mean?</li> <li>• All 'Art' is political and everyone who conveys a message through the visual needs to be aware of this power.</li> <li>• Why is the younger generation appropriating the history of previous generations when it suits them, but rejecting it otherwise? What are our understandings of 'Oppression', of 'Subjectivity' and 'Objectivity'?</li> </ul> <p><i>Language, Process and Inclusion:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to work on finding the language to work with where we are now, the hermeneutical space of radicalism and conservatism.</li> <li>• Can our Education be responsive to our society in its current pedagogical modality, which is deeply infused in Western canons of form, process, taste and style?</li> <li>• The previous generation of artists conceptualised an understanding of the 'Human Condition' – what are we conceptualising now? What is the ontology of our Condition?</li> <li>• What ontology do the student protests reflect?</li> </ul>	<p><i>Identity, Politics, Appropriation, Pluralism, Privilege, Silence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the personal narrative? What is the institutional narrative? Is there space for dissonance between the two?</li> <li>• From which Canon are we taught to think and what kind of 'human' does this make us to be?</li> <li>• By re-reading our Archives we can disrupt the present status quo.</li> <li>• Is there a 'Culture' which facilitates the authentic Black African voice?</li> <li>• 'Don't call me African, call me Black.'</li> <li>• 'Patriarchal assumptions affect my Being'.</li> <li>• To appreciate 'Diversity', you must be aware that there is a deliberate power dynamic at play. Uncritical and unconscious engagement is wrong.</li> <li>• If you appropriate with intellectual commitment or theoretical substance, then it's OK to appropriate. Just be conscious of what you are doing and why you are doing it.</li> <li>• Ditch the White Guilt.</li> <li>• The 'I' is easy, the 'Us' is difficult.</li> <li>• There is no 'Equality' within the African Diaspora. Some are more privileged than others.</li> <li>• To address social challenges, address structural issues. Understand that underneath the design of all challenges, lies a structure, systems and relationships.</li> <li>• People construct their identities in relation to the objects [resources] around them.</li> </ul> <p><i>Language:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does 'cohesion' silence? If so, why?</li> </ul>