

SOLOMON MAHLANGU HOUSE:

SELF-ASSERTION AND HUMANISATION THROUGH CLAIMING BLACK SPACE

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... It's not even just about universities, it's about this damn country that we keep saying is one thing, but it isn't. It's something else, right? We trying to have a more robust conversation about what it is, and how we can get it to what we said we wanted it to be, and one of those ways is "free education".

Julie Nxadi from Ellen Kuzwayo University, currently known as Rhodes University (quoted by Cawe, 2015)

In South Africa, 2015 has been labelled the "year of the student", as a result of the eruption of nation-wide student protests. It started in March 2015 with the *#RhodesMustFall* movement at the University of Cape Town, a protest against a statue of notorious colonialist Cecil John Rhodes on the university campus. While the protest coalesced around the statue itself, the movement had the wider objective of decolonising the University of Cape Town (Rhodes Must Fall, 2015: 9-10). A key tactic of the student protests was the occupation and renaming of Bremner House, the University administration building, choosing instead to name it Azania House – an alternative name for South Africa that emerged from the Black Consciousness movement during Apartheid.

The *#RhodesMustFall* movement ignited debate in the national media and on university campuses across the country. Importantly it formed the organisational and tactical basis for the next round of student protests that would reach their high point with the *#FeesMustFall* movement which started in October 2015 at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

While the *#FeesMustFall* protests were aimed at reversing a University decision to raise fees, they were also an expression of much deeper tensions within South African academic and social institutions. The spatial and conceptual propositions of these protest actions can be read as a decolonizing appropriation of space, understanding Teresa Pinheiro's formulation that "[i]n reality, forms of resistance and appropriation present themselves as ambivalent and, empirically, are almost inseparable" (Pinheiro 2004: 46).

This reading allows us to question South African architectural space through Katherine McKittrick's assertion that Glissant reconciles the black subject to geography, arguing that expressive acts, particularly the naming of place – regardless of expressive method and technique – is also a process of self-assertion and humanization, a naming of inevitable black geographic presence. To put it another way, naming place is also an act of naming the self and self-histories. (McKittrick, 2006: xxii)

SENATE HOUSE

The Senate House is the main administrative building at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg (Wits), South Africa. It was designed by professor John Fassler, who headed the Department of Architecture at the time. Fassler was a close collaborator of Rex Martienssen, the leading South African modernist architect and member of the Ciam, with whom he both taught at the university and practiced with as "Martienssen, Fassler and Cooke". Fassler designed or was involved in the design of numerous buildings on the university campus including the John Moffat Building for the Department of architecture at Wits and the Chemical engineering building ("John Fassler", s.a.).

The Senate House, completed in 1971, is a heavily articulated brutalist building that accommodates multiple activities in a unified building complex. It stands in contrast to the neo-classical language employed in the early major buildings on the University, including The Great Hall, which sits directly in front of Senate House. Fassler employed an aesthetic language and spatial logic derived from the new-brutalist architecture developed in the design of social housing and educational architecture by post-World War II British architects such as the Smithsons (Banham, 1966).

This period in Johannesburg coincided with what some people termed the "golden age of prosperity" with Johannesburg trumpeted as the "only real industrial complex south of Milan" (Chipkin, 2008: 250). The apartheid economy was booming, and black resistance has been suppressed with the imprisonment of political leaders like Nelson Mandela and the banning of black political organisations (Thompson, 2001).



FIG. 1. SOUTHERN ENTRANCE INTO THE SENATE HOUSE. © PHOTO: NOLAN DENNIS, 2016.

This period also marks the culmination of the transformation of the city from a “Colonial Capitalist City into Johannesburg, the Apartheid City” (Chipkin, 2008). A unique form of urbanisation marked by the segregation of space, infrastructure and movement on a micro-scale and the decentralisation of urban landscape on the macro-level. All of this designed primarily to allow the service of industry by masses of black bodies while saving the white population from interacting with the labour creating and maintaining their prosperity (Chipkin, 2008).

Wits University itself is located in *Braamfontein* to the immediate north of the central business district of Johannesburg. A formally poor, working-class white area, Braamfontein was redeveloped in the 1960s into a business district characterised by new concrete towers bocks. The university sits on the spine of the Braamfontein ridge, a series of rocky hills running east-west across Johannesburg.

The Senate House stands on the southern boundary of the university, facing the city centre to the south-east, and opening out to the public on Jorissen street. The building consists of a 47 meters-high tower block facing south along the public street with two side wings perpendicular to the street and a short block opposite the tower which faces the rest of the University campus, accessible only to those who have already passed through University security - a selected public. These built masses frame a covered central atrium space, which forms an interior piazza-like space called the *student concourse*. Due to the steep fall of the site, the student



FIG. 2. NORTHERN ENTRANCE INTO THE WITS CENTRAL BLOCK. © PHOTO: NOLAN DENNIS, 2016.

concourse opens at ground level on the northern end but is actually 4 floors above the street level on the southern end. This particular vertical relation between public / private and interior / exterior accounts for the ability of the students to force the management into specific type of engagement (“Senate House...”, 1977).

The blocks surrounding the concourse are devoted to teaching facilities, academic and administration offices. The student concourse was conceived as a space creating opportunities for staff and students to mix in an informal manner. Beneath the student concourse is a level of lecture theatres, and, further below, two levels of parking for University staff. The South-facing tower rises to twelve storeys of offices and is crowned with VIP suites that command superb views over the city to the south and the northern suburbs to the north. This is where the Vice Chancellor’s office is located and where the executive council host meetings including deliberations on university fee hikes. They do this while served from an adjacent kitchen in a setting that is designed to provide a dignified stage for entertaining management and visiting VIPs.

The Senate House is designed so that the bulk of administrative staff can enter and leave the university without needing to engage with the academic and social realities of the institution. There is a direct elevator between the administration parking lots and administration offices. The administrative tower opens directly onto the public street (mediated by private security). This allows an uninterrupted flow of approved administrative bodies

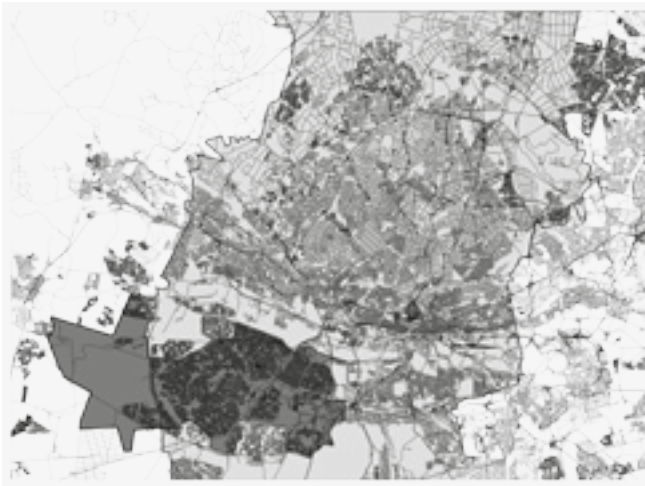


FIG. 3. MAP OF GREATER JOHANNESBURG HIGHLIGHTING THE LOCATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND CAMPUSES (DARK GREY CIRCLE) AND OF THE SOWETO TOWNSHIP (DARK GREY AREA). © ELABORATION: PANDEANI LIPHOSA, 2016.



FIG. 5. SENATE HOUSE FROM JORRISON STREET. © PHOTO: NOLAN DENNIS, 2016.

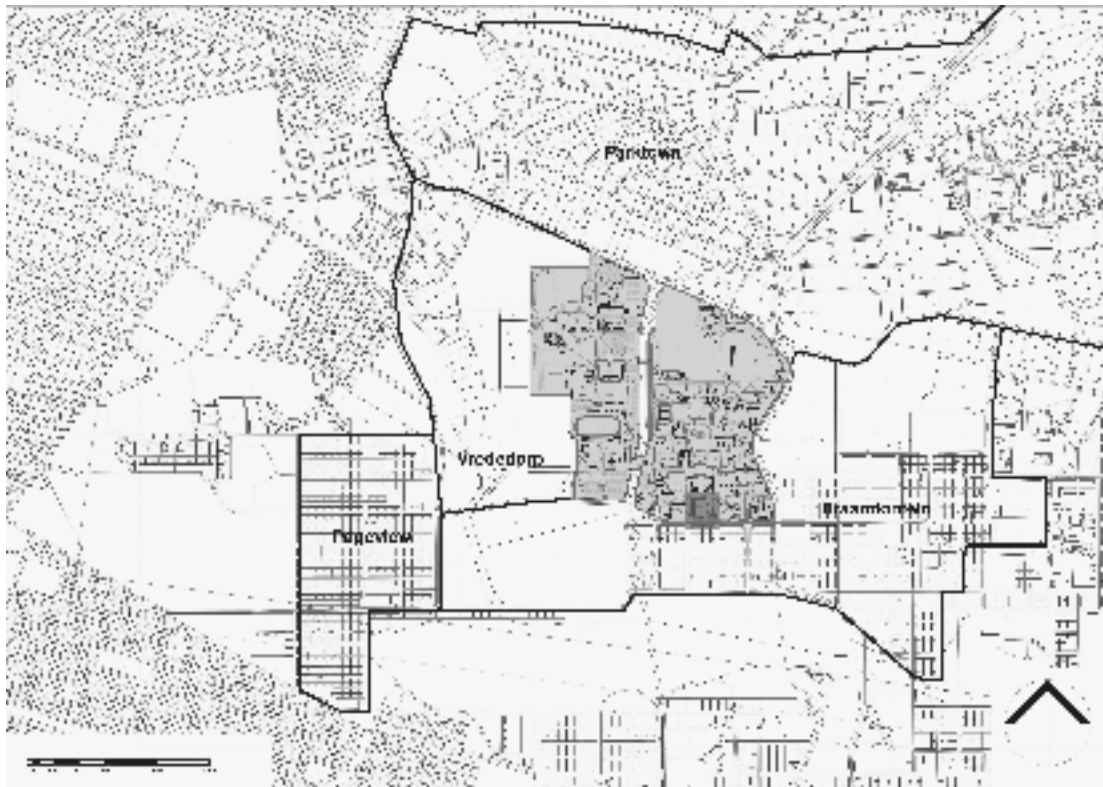


FIG. 4. PLAN SHOWING UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND IN URBAN CONTEXT. © ELABORATION BY PANDEANI LIPHOSA, 2016.

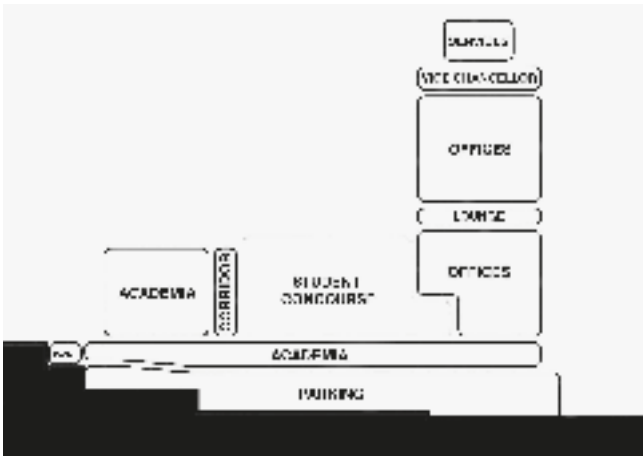


FIG. 6. SCHEMATIC SECTION OF THE SENATE HOUSE SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION OF MAIN FUNCTIONS. © PANDEANI LIPHOSA, 2016.



FIG. 7. SOUTHERN ENTRANCE INTO THE SENATE HOUSE. © PHOTO: NOLAN DENNIS, 2016.



FIG. 8. TURNSTILES AT THE SOUTHERN ENTRANCE INTO THE SENATE HOUSE. © PHOTO: NOLAN DENNIS, 2016.



FIG. 9. SENATE HOUSE EXIT FROM WITHIN THE STUDENT CONCOURSE. © PHOTO: NOLAN DENNIS, 2016.

offering no opportunity for engagement with the very students, academics and spaces they are administrating. However, a crucial point in the movement of administrative staff intersects with the student concourse such that during the occupation the students were able to extend the realm of their control across the path of administrative movement and block the flow of staff in and out of the building. Through exploiting this architectural quirk, the students were able to appropriate power of mobility from the authorised security personnel and the ambition of their architectural accomplices.

Access to the Senate house, the student concourse and ultimately the administrative offices of the university is possible through 4 access points. A set of doors on the northern end open onto a passage between the Senate House and the Central Block, this space between the buildings is a shaded and protected space which students have adopted as an informal smoke and socialising space. There are two smaller entrances on the east and west wings which connect to movement routes between other buildings on campus. The final access point is via a set of staircases and elevators in the tower core, which move people from the street and the parking levels, 5 floors up to the student concourse and further upward to the administrative offices.

The building's street front entrance reflects other administrative state buildings of the same period, rendered in "*skoonsigbeton* – fair face concrete – seemingly able to withstand a rocket attack" (Chipkin, 2008: xx). This association extends to the fortress like treatment of its entry points. Rather than welcoming users into the building, its entry points are characterised by tight and compressive spaces, intimate proximity to security infrastructure and dark passages, staircases and elevators.

These claustrophobic routes lead to the student concourse, a 729 square meters triple volume, light filled atrium celebrating one's successful navigation of the complex security procedures and labyrinthine arteries connecting the building to the outside world. A carefully detailed wooden staircase emphasises the vertical rise of the building lifting the university administration upwards above this vast and sealed interiority in the shadow of the tower block.

TIMELINE

The Wits *#FeesMustFall* movement and the occupation of Senate House has to be understood in relation to its immediate predecessor the *#RhodesMustFall* movement. A time line of the occupation must therefore begin on March 9th 2015.

9 MARCH

Chumani Maxwele, a student at the University of Cape Town (UCT), throws human faeces on a statue of Cecil John Rhodes;

12 MARCH

a public mass meeting is held on the campus; a movement is started calling itself *RhodesMustFall*;

17 MARCH

The *Black Students Movement* is started at Rhodes University in solidarity with *RhodesMustFall*;

In spite of the influence of new-brutalism, and its ethical ambitions, the student occupation positions the Senate House to be read in relation to Clive Chipkin's observation that "South Africa society [...] exposed more blatantly than elsewhere what architecture and planning of inequality and exclusion really looked like, beneath the intellectual posturing and glint of modernity" (Chipkin, 2008). In a poetic reflection of the anti-apartheid slogan "No normal sport in an abnormal society" (Roberts, 2011), the student occupation rewrites the Senate House as an illustration of how architecture is put to work in the pursuit of ideology regardless of the progressive ambitions of its designers. In doing so the occupation implicitly echoes the anti-apartheid slogan by tailoring it to the specific situation; otherwise said: no ethical building in an unethical context.

TIMELINE

The sentiment that found expression in the *#FeesMustFall* movement, reflects the long history of black exclusion from South African social, professional and academic spaces. The expression of these sentiments has itself a long history of protest and resistance within universities and in general society. Indeed, the spatial legacy of Apartheid in the University consists of "terrains that established a vibrant oppositional student movement and other forms of resistance within and related to the higher education sector" (Reddy, 2004: 5). However, one of the key elements distinguishing 2015 from previous student protests is the impact of social media and digital space on the ability of the students to communicate, mobilise and participate in the protest. This information allowed the protests to rapidly respond to, evolve and control the movement of information and bodies on the university campus and in the city. This distributed network of students both accelerated and amplified the protests, allowing the occupation of physical, symbolic and virtual space at a speed in which university authorities, police and even the media could not keep pace with, in a very real sense moving the terrain of protest out of view of the university administrator and into the "orbit of control" of the media-savvy students. What is unique in this latest round of protests is the renaming of the Senate House to Solomon Mahlangu House after a liberation fighter who was executed

19 MARCH

Students march to the Bremner building, the administrative building of the University of Cape Town;

20 MARCH

Students storm the Bremner building and occupy the boardroom, renaming it the Azania House;

27 MARCH

The statue of Cecil John Rhodes is boarded up;

4 APRIL

Similar protests begin erupting around the country, with colonial and apartheid monuments defaced at universities and public space;

8 APRIL

Students disrupt the University of Cape Town council meeting to decide the fate of the statue, asserting "no decisions about us, without us";

by the Apartheid State. This action can be thought of as another form of disruptive violence against a symbolic infrastructure: the historical systems of naming and knowing and ultimately of claiming ownership.

Along with the “#...MustFall” naming convention, the *#FeesMustFall* protests at the University of the Witwatersrand also reproduced a critical action from the *#RhodesMustFall* movement: the physical occupation and re-naming of university administrative infrastructure. This kind of occupation becomes significant in a post-apartheid context as it functions through an integration of black body-space into the production of architectural space.

Recalling what Marlene NourbeSe Philip describes as opposition “spoken with the whole body” (NourbeSe Philip, 1997), the students of *#FeesMustFall* physically occupied the concourse of the Senate House, but the action implicated the entire socio-historical framework embodied in the twelve storeys administrative and teaching building. A building which is self-consciously both the symbolic and physical “[...] heart of the complex and provides a fulcrum around which all activities revolve” (“Senate House...”, 1977: 5).

The enclosed concourse is the traditional site for student protests, and has often witnessed the destruction of university furniture, the vandalising of walls, windows and doors and the trashing of its corridors. A particular type of disruptive violence against infrastructure is a typical student tactic in the asymmetrical negotiation between the demands of marginalised students and the power of university management to ignore these. This disruption operates within the realm of the spectacle-event, acting as a *détournement*, an overturning of both the everyday representations of university space as well as disruption of the notion of the student in South African social imagination (Debord, 1967).

The student concourse functions as an internalised public square. Its vast inarticulate space is informed by the program of its enclosing perimeter. The boundary conditions inform the character of its open space. The student concourse acts as the interspace between the central tower core (containing lifts and staircases), the school shop which sells branded university merchandise, the admissions and finance offices and a small café.

9 APRIL

The statue of Cecil John Rhodes is removed;

10 APRIL

The students are served with an eviction notice to vacate Azania House;

MID APRIL

Students at the University of Stellenbosch start *OpenStellenbosch*, an organisation dedicated to the desegregation and opening of language policy of that university, inspired by *RhodesMustFall*;

14 OCTOBER

Students at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, start a protest against an announced 10 % increase in university tuition for the following year. Students block all exits from the university, demanding a 0 % increase;

15 OCTOBER

Students calling themselves *#FeesMustFall* occupy the student concourse at the Senate House, renaming it Solomon Mahlangu House;

Its everyday functions include hosting temporary exhibitions, promotions or simply allowing thoroughfare.

By occupying this concourse space, students aim to disrupt the everyday bureaucratic functioning of the institutions. Historically protest action in the student concourse was directed towards the structures and the functions housed on the perimeter of this space – the fees office, the admissions centre, etc. In the *#FeesMustFall* protest the students made a unique claim on the interior space of this monolith. Through renaming the building as well as physically occupying the student concourse the students disrupted more than just the bureaucratic functions of the space but the symbolic meaning of the space. The demand was not for an adjustment of bureaucracy but a fundamental change of the university, a critical reorientation from questions of implementation of policy towards questions of space in itself (Mpho Makitla, 2016).

During the occupation of Azania House (former Bremner House) the *#RhodesMustFall* movement articulated their aims in the “Bremner Occupation Statement”:

We, the Rhodes Must Fall movement, are occupying the Bremner building with the intention to: 1) disrupt the normal processes of management, and; 2) force management to accept our demands. We have chosen to occupy the Bremner building, and the Archie Mafeje room specifically, because of its strategic and historical significance – it is the place where management carries out its activities, and these are precisely the activities we seek to subvert. (Rhodes Must Fall, 2015: 9)

This notion of subversion is premised on creating and managing power out of the very elements that seek to undermine student agency (Greenblatt, 1988). By occupying these building-spaces with their bodies, the students forced the administration into a particular enacting of power. The administration’s response to the occupation revealed their previously concealed position at the intersection of direct violence (the use of armed security) and administrative violence (the expulsion and suspensions of students). This subversion of power highlights a key spatial agenda in the occupation. The act of renaming asserts a claim of ownership that distinguishes this set of protests from their predecessors. In the self-organisation of cleaning

17 OCTOBER

The Wits University agrees to suspend its decision to raise tuition. Students demands include the end of outsourcing low paid labour at the university as well as free education;

19 OCTOBER

Protests spread to UCT and Rhodes University;

20 OCTOBER

Protests are reported at UCT, Wits, Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Fort Hare University, Stellenbosch;

21 OCTOBER

5 000 students from UCT and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology march on the South African Parliament. Protests are reported at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University;

22 OCTOBER

Students from Wits and the University of Johannesburg march to Luthuli House, the headquarters of the ruling party ANC to hand over a memorandum;



FIG. 10. BANNER STATING "SOLOMON HOUSE" HUNG BY #FEESMUSTFALL DEMONSTRATORS IN THE SENATE HOUSE' STUDENT CONCOURSE, OCTOBER 2015. © SOURCE: [HTTP://WWW.FEESMUSTFALL.JOBURG/GALLERY/](http://www.feesmustfall.joburg/gallery/).

duties, the reorganisation of internal furniture and the poetic hanging of a banner with the new name Solomon House from the structural columns of the atrium, the students realise Khumo Sebambo's observation that "if space was an organising tool for oppression in South Africa's past, then it is more than fair to say that in the 'new' South Africa, space should be reorganised to ensure equality" (Sebambo, 2015: 108).

The significance of the Solomon House and *#FeeMustFall* movement for the architectural landscape in South Africa is articulated in the *Wits FeesMustFall* manifesto: We call for the removal of symbols of oppression and colonialism which includes names of buildings, institutions, statues and any other Western symbol that celebrates colonial power relations in South Africa. This is an attempt to destroy the ways in which white supremacy continues to annihilate the possibility of black power. (Wits FeesMustFall, 2015)

23 OCTOBER

Students from all around the country march to the president's office at the Union Building to demand a 0 % fee increase, free education and the end of outsourcing low paid staff at universities;

23 OCTOBER

The president announces that there will be no fee increases in 2016 and that the government will explore options to make university education free.

This call, reiterated through multiple statements from students groups across the country, demands a re-examination of the spatial mechanics and architectural character of the university and its location, Johannesburg.

The occupation of the Senate House lasted less than three weeks; in this time the building was never physically occupied for more than seven continuous days. The occupation was enacted through temporary activations of the building, hosting mass-meetings, interacting with various authorities and as a staging ground for marches and other forms of mobile disruptions. It is therefore important to view this occupation as both a physical phenomenon as well as an occupation of the symbolic architecture of black powerlessness. These symbolic spaces are anchored in non-linearity and find expression in the spaces that Glissant describes as “the underside”. In fact, Edouard Glissant’s concepts of errantry and creolisation allows us to trace the rhizomatic occupation of a space that can be best described as a contested geography (Glissant, 1997: quoted by McKittrick, 2006: xii); “[b]lack matters are spatial matters.” (McKittrick, 2006: xii).

Decolonisation has re-emerged in South Africa as a counter concept to the transition politics that have dominated South African mainstream discourse since the fall of Apartheid. In opposition to the negotiated settlement that marked the end of Apartheid, the students’ call for decolonisation echoes the language of the struggle against apartheid. In using the names and personalities of the anti-apartheid struggle the students protest position themselves in historical continuity with the ideas and struggles of the colonial period. Thus it is consistent that their demands directly reflect the urgency and ambition of Franz Fanon’s observation that:

Without any period of transition, there is a total, complete, and absolute substitution [...] Its unusual importance is that it constitutes, from the very first day, the minimum demands of the colonized. To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded. (Fanon, 1963: 1)

This demand for fundamental change reflects a scathing critique of the negotiated settlement.

[...] we are starving while the university prioritises parking over residences. We are here demanding one thing, and one thing only: free and quality education in our lifetime. [...] Comrades, the honeymoon of 1994, when we were told that we are free, is over. (Dlamini, 2015: min. 15’23” and 51’13”)

The student protests present a strategic and tactical restaging of the conceptual limits of both occupation and appropriation. In post-colonial

situations appropriation is seen as the ways in which the colonised adopt the tools and methods of the dominant force in order to resist its political control (Ashcroft *et al.*, 2000). This process is incremental and ongoing – a process analogous to the long transition politics of post-apartheid South Africa. Occupation on the other hand implies an immediacy and temporality cast as an action at odds with appropriation. However, the two historical conditions are integral to the transformation of Solomon Mahlangu House: colonial occupation, and decolonizing occupation point to another conception of the relationship between the occupation and appropriation. Colonial occupation combines both the spectacle of occupation and the long-term project of total appropriation of space (*ibid.*)

Naturally decolonisation follows from colonisation, however it is important to note the students' own reading of the space:

It's no coincidence that these struggles emerge in historically white institutions because these institutions bare the face of anti-blackness where the death of black life is a constant ritual, such as the constant exclusion of black bodies, the incidences of black face, the generalised dishonour of black people within these institutions; the intellectual dishonour of black students in academia as well as the dishonour of black workers in terms of their working conditions. ("Wits FeesMustFall Manifesto", 2015)

The occupation is thus cast not in terms of a dichotomy between long-term appropriation and short-term occupation, but rather occupation is seen as a strategy for appropriation.

The relation is even further complicated by the students' assertion that the goal of this appropriation is not to take over aspects of the dominant culture but rather to "Recognise that the history of those who built our university – enslaved and working class black people – has been erased through institutional culture" (Rhodes Must Fall, 2015: 8). So the goal of occupation is not simply to appropriate colonial spaces but to re-identify the forces already present in these spaces. An action that recalls Glissant's assertion that "each of its parts patterns activity implicated in the activity of every other. The history of peoples has led to this dynamic. They need not stop running on their own momentum to join in this movement, since they are inscribed in it already" (Glissant, 1997: 33). Or as the "Wits FeesMustFall Manifesto" (2015) describes their own work: "This renaming is not a mere renaming of buildings but a recreation of their function, correcting the erasure of black history and reclaiming the spaces of the entire university".

White students in particular cannot be consulted in such a process because they can never truly empathise with the profound violence exerted on the psyche of black students. (Rhodes Must Fall, 2015: 9)

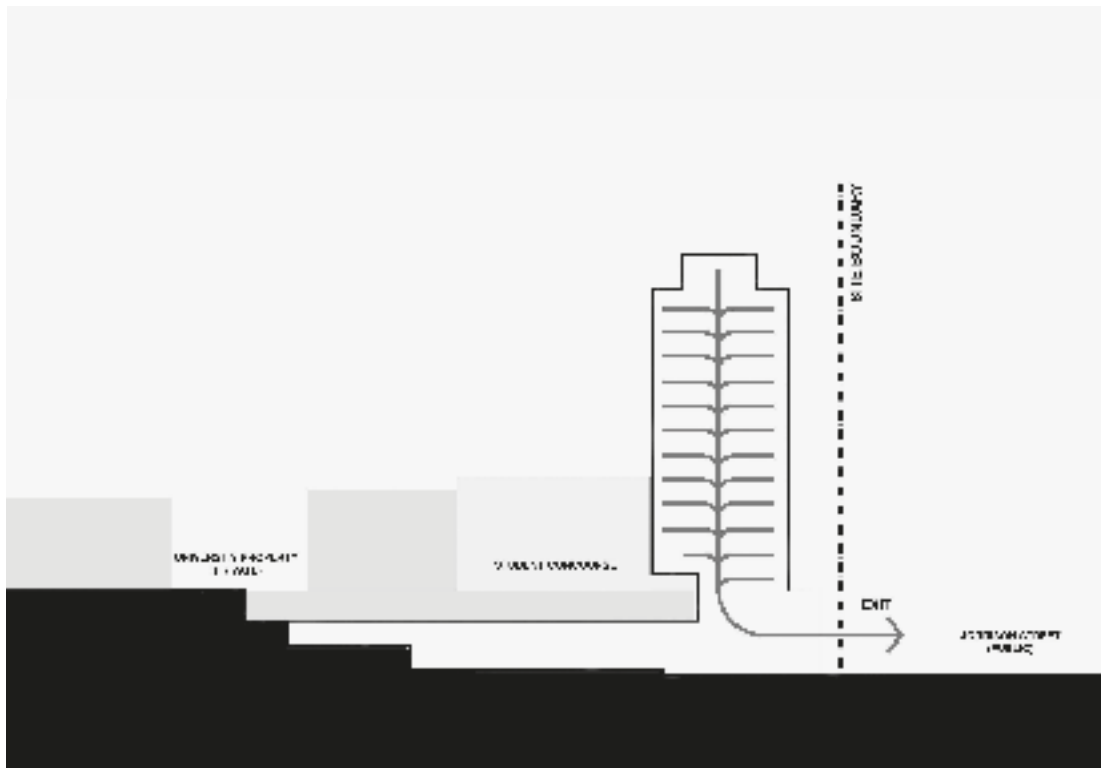


FIG. 11. SCHEMATIC SECTION OF THE SENATE HOUSE SHOWING ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF'S EXIT FLOW. © PANDEANI LIPHOSA, 2016.

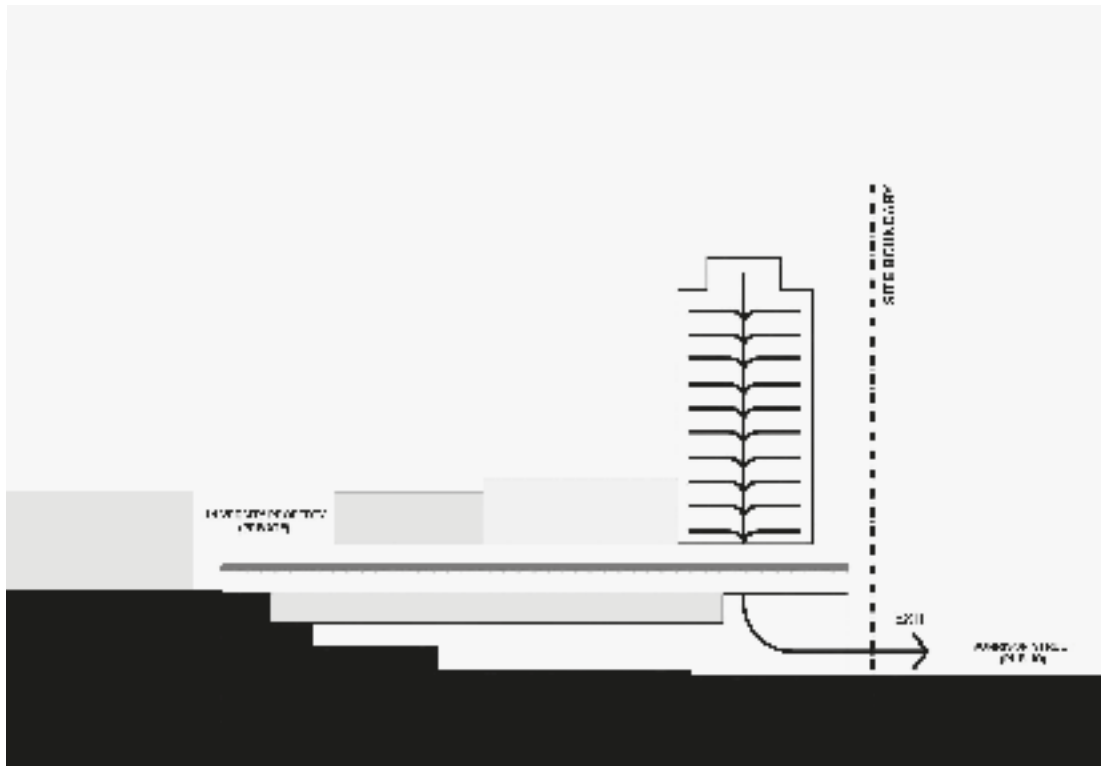


FIG. 12. SCHEMATIC SECTION SHOWING STUDENT DISRUPTION OF ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF'S EXIT FLOW. © PANDEANI LIPHOSA, 2016.



FIG. 13. IMAGE OF CLOSED ACCESS POINT INTO THE WITS THEATRE. © PHOTO: NOLAN DENNIS, 2016.

The Wits University exists in ongoing conversation with a constantly transforming Johannesburg cityscape. The university's response to the democratisation of the city, in terms of access and movement, reflect an ideological position characterised by lingering apartheid anxieties. That is, as the city has become more spatially democratic: legally and actually more accessible by black and poor citizens, the university has become more closed, financially and physically inaccessible. On the scale of the entire campus, this closure is evident in the radical limitation of movement in and out of the university. This is achieved through the retroactive and permanent closure of the majority of access points, quite literally turning buildings inside out by sealing public facing front doors and converting service entrances into primary access points. This closure is managed by the construction of defensive architectures at the remaining entrance points, turning the urban landscape of the university into a privileged arena outside of the city proper. It is important to note that this was not the case during apartheid, when the city was itself a racially exclusive privileged arena.

The backbone of the apartheid machinery was the colonial capacity to classify and thus separate people into a hierarchy of different "species" (Mamdani, 2012). This system was dependant on its ability to maintain this separateness both physically and mentally. The reality is that Johannesburg is still suffering from the trauma of this history of segregation. Children of the rich and children of the poor don't go to the same schools; their parents don't drink at the same bars; they do not use the same public transport

nor do they live in close proximity to one another. Despite 22 years of democratic development the rich are still predominately white and the poor are overwhelmingly black, the racial and power dynamics of the work place remain skewed.

In South Africa the university has become one of the few places where these two worlds collide on a notionally equal basis. For young South Africans this is often their first encounter of the national “other” in a meaningful way. The mine owner’s daughter has no choice but to share a classroom with the son of a rock-driller, the children of the bosses confront for the first time the children of the workers. It is the Senate house that welcomes these first year students to the Wits. This moment of encounter is mediated by the administrative functions housed in this architectural space. The bureaucratic rituals of becoming a student are performed within the quadruple volume space illuminated by daylight filtering through Perspex® domes and reflecting off brightly painted steel roof trusses. 729 square meters bounded by the financial, academic and security infrastructure of the Senate house.

The architectural section manifests the complex relations of the university. The tower block, crowned by the vice chancellor’s office, is the visual and actual seat of this institution’s power, resting as it does high above the student concourse. While the student concourse forms the podium on which both the architecture and the administration derive their elevated status. Students know this. They also know that it is their job to make management account. This knowledge was brought into critical action on October 16th 2015.

After two days of protesting the Vice Chancellor (VC) arrived to engage the occupying students. Instead of the public announcement he had expected to give, the VC of the university, professor Adam Habib, was forced to join the students on the floor, and rather than address them was made to sit on the floor of the concourse among students and share a meal of plain brown bread with them. This was the type of conversation that was expected in Solomon House (former Senate House). The protesters wanted answers, to which the VC responded that the responsibility ultimately rested with the executive committee. So the student body decided to peacefully keep him there until the executive committee came to contribute to resolving the matter of a 10,5 % increase in fees for the year 2016. This action constituted a major reimagining of circulation within the university space. By determining the movement of management, the students enacted a democratic transfer of power over movement from the security infrastructure embedded in the architectural detailing and intended to police the mobility of students, into the hands of students and workers and their reimagining of what this architecture could do.

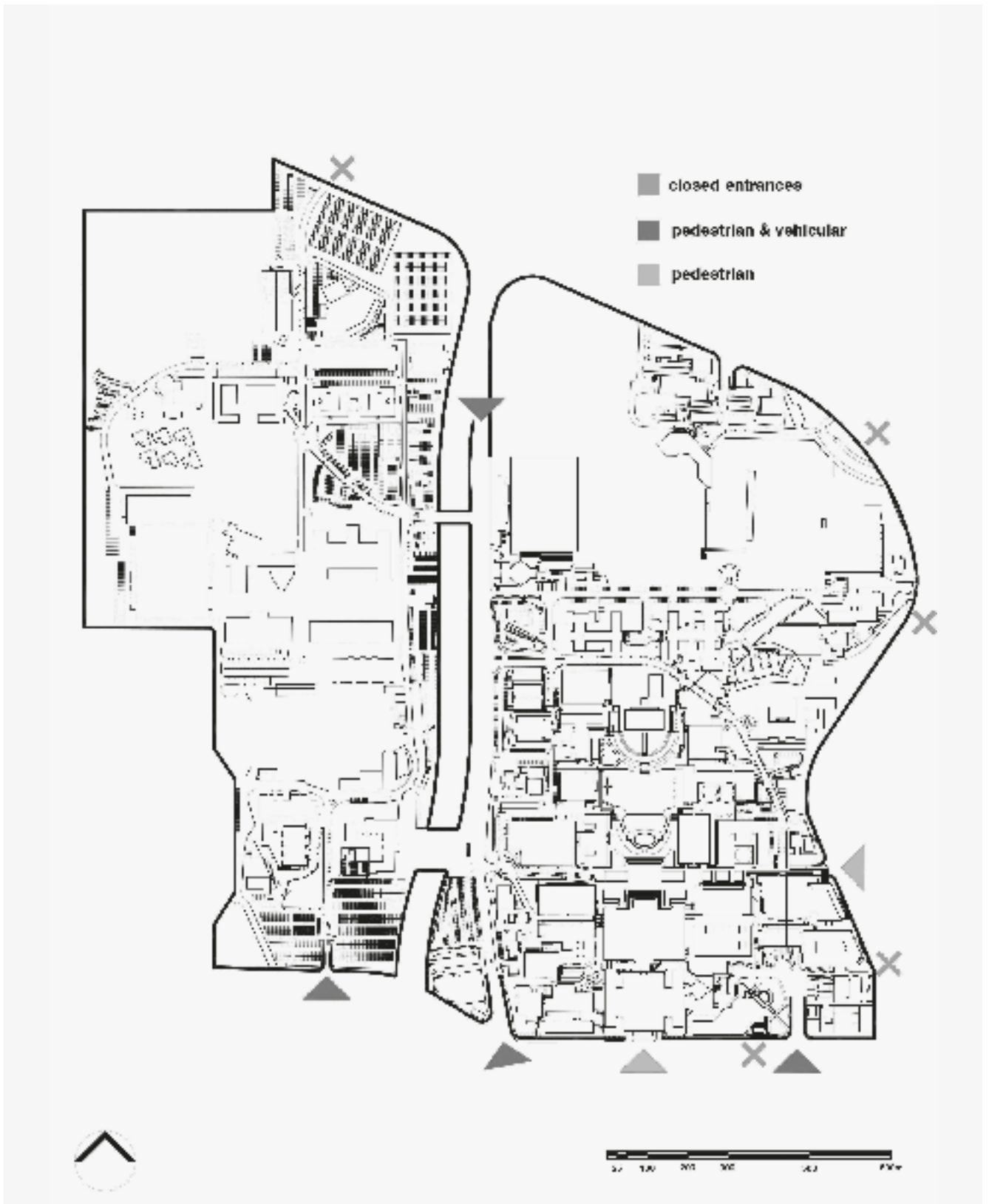


FIG. 14. PLAN OF THE WITWATERSRAND UNIVERSITY CAMPUS SHOWING EXTENT OF RETROACTIVELY ISOLATING UNIVERSITY FROM THE CITY. © PANDEANI LIPHOSA, 2016.

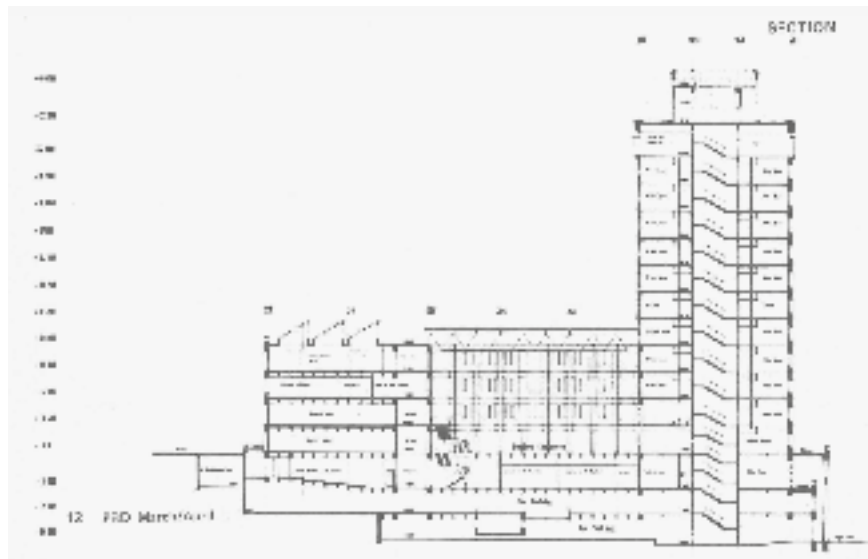


FIG. 15. CROSS-SECTION OF THE SENATE HOUSE. SOURCE: "SENATE HOUSE...", 1977.

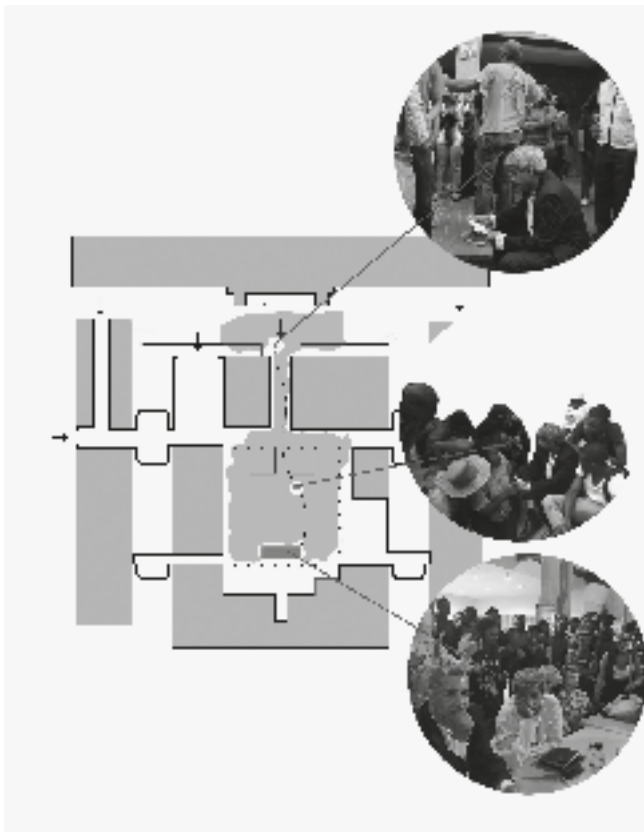


FIG. 16. IMAGES OF THE FIRST DAY OF OCCUPATION OF SENATE HOUSE. © PANDEANI LIPHOSA, 2016.

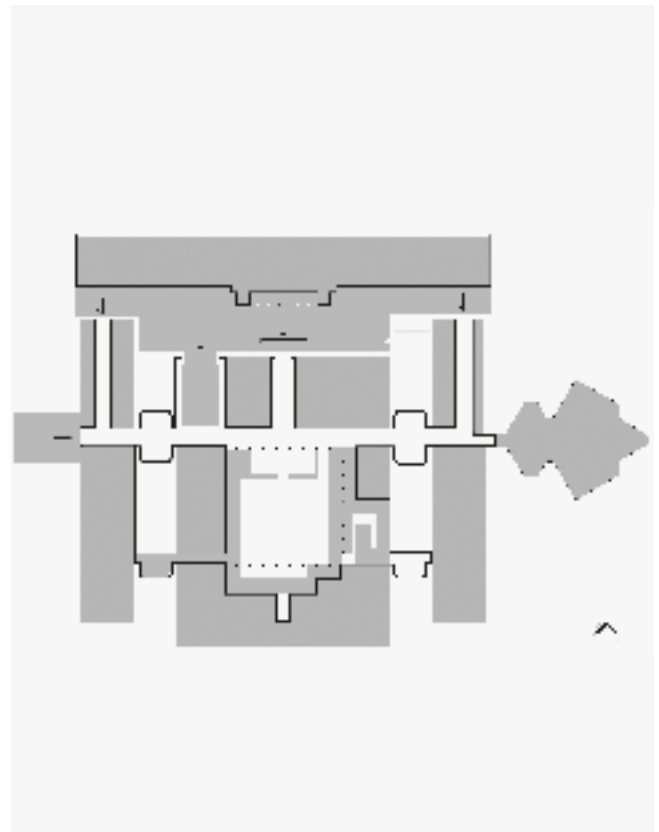


FIG. 17. GROUND FLOOR PLAN DIAGRAM OF THE USE OF SPACE WITHIN THE SOLOMON HOUSE DURING THE PROTEST. © PANDEANI LIPHOSA, 2016.

This student concourse has a ceremonial staircase connecting the lecture theatres below the concourse with the main entrance as well as rising to link to the seminar rooms on the floor above. The staircase is traditionally the platform from which the VC addresses new students and their parents at the beginning of the academic year. During the protests, however, the tables had turned. Standing on the staircase were students addressing the VC and his executive. The meeting went on until 5 AM, to the tempo of students singing struggle songs and demanding a 0 % increase in school fees. In this moment management and students engaged in a dialogue located outside of the spatial, temporal and political dimensions that previously defined South African academic space-time.

This transformation raised questions fundamental to the meaning of universities in general and of the University of the Witwatersrand in particular. Is a university education a privilege reserved for a racial or class elite? Or perhaps more critically how does a university which has, for 120 years, provided education *for* a racially defined white Eurocentric elite, *by* a racially defined white Eurocentric elite; transform itself into an institution orientated towards educating the vast majority of South Africans, particularly the marginalised black working class students?

The occupation of the student concourse illustrates how the collapse of conventional bureaucratic space through direct, disruptive, student action can inform a new imaginary. The students, albeit temporarily for now, recast the foundations of the entire academic contract through a denial of the historical agency expressed through concrete colonnaded enquiry and cashier's counters, brushed steel elevators, glass fronted school shops, and the entire aesthetic network of administration, authority and so called 'student assistance'.

The triangular academic contract between academic, administrator and student was called into question of the basis of a set of fairly straightforward concerns: can the university be a site of liberation for black working class students? Can it allow the expression of what Brent Hayes Edwards describes as "the coexistence of frames of reference" (2008)?

Students are fully aware that financial exclusion is simply another tactic within the greater struggle for equality, dignity and liberation.

We can't separate high fees from vac accommodation, from staff being mistreated, from the lack of black academics, from naming a university after a murderer; all of these things are linked, it's the colony; all these things are linked because people are saying they reject the colony. (Khanyisa Nomoyi from Ellen Kuzwayo University quoted by Cawe, 2015)

The naming of the Senate House to Solomon Mahlangu House happened roughly between Monday October 19th and Tuesday October 20th. Solomon Mahlangu was a student at Mamelodi High School who did not complete high school because of ongoing riots. He then joined the ANC in 1976 and went into exile to receive military training. He covertly returned as a cadre to assist with student protest. He was accosted by police, and the ensuing gun battle killed 2 civilians. Mahlangu was arrested and charged with murder and terrorism. He was executed on April 6th 1979.

Black freedom is embedded within an economy of race and violence (McKittrick, 2014). The renaming of the Senate House is an act of violence that places itself within the continuum of decolonization (Fanon, 1963). The writing was on the wall. UCT's Bremner House was renamed Azania House; Stellenbosch's Admin B building was renamed the Winnie Mandela building; during protests Rhodes University was renamed Ellen Kuzwayo University. The Solomon Mahlangu House re-imagines the mechanics of possibility; the renegotiation of spatial agency disorients the authority embodied in these spaces and thus opens the door to new, unexpected modes of engagement.

The Senate House can be described, among many other things, as a modernist building. It is the product of a trip to university campuses across Europe and the Americas by its architect professor John Fassler, then head of the Department of architecture at the university and the then Vice Chancellor, professor G.R. Bozzoli ("Senate House...", 1977). Whatever illusions these two men collected on their journey and later projected onto this complex enclosure have been replaced by new illusions, and these are in the always-ongoing process of themselves being replaced, what Glissant calls the internal obligation "to renew itself in every instance on the basis of a series of forgettings" (Glissant, 1997: 69). If the triple floor height columned portico of the tower block was designed to echo the classicism of the original buildings on campus in welcoming the invited and intimidating the unsure, we can now make out other echoes, the new purpose of this space is providing workers with a space to gather and protest their demands for a living wage, in the tradition of all seats of public power. So while the patterned brick paving, planting boxes, seats and pergolas are features designed to link senate house to its neighbours, Solomon Mahlangu House repurposes these planting boxes and seats as podiums for students to address one another and to debate and discover a way forward on new common agendas. The colonnade along the eastern perimeter of the concourse became the media hub of the movement. A network of computers gathered around each other collecting and distributing information to people within the concourse and its virtual community. A projector screened incoming tweets and comments about the march from news agencies. The southern edge of the concourse along where the cashier desks are, saw mattresses being placed on the floor for students to rest their heads.

And in all this we can make out traces of the rhizomatic becoming in architecture that “is entwined with strategic and meaningful languages, acts, expressions, and experiences” (McKittrick, 2006: xxxi).

[...] the university is committed to a process of “transformation” – a process of liberal paternalism which has left us, 21 years after formal apartheid, asking the same questions about our country: Why is our land in the hands of white people? Why do white people dictate where and how we can live? Why do white people dictate how and what we learn? This University too, belongs to black people and therefore no black student should ever be turned away from a university when it sits on his or her land. This is why we are taking over Avenue House. (Rhodes Must Fall, 2015: 19)

This is the only sort of universality there is: when, from a specific enclosure, the deepest voice cries out. (Glissant, 1997 : 74)

Pandeani Liphosa was born in Polokwane, Limpopo, South Africa and currently lives and studies architecture in Johannesburg at the University of Witwatersrand. Having worked and studied within the built environment for just over 10 years, Pandeani has developed a particular interest in how it has played a role in the urbanisation of the African continent. Based on a prominently architectural perspective, buildings are explored as more than just passive surfaces that contextualize the expression of power. Pandeani’s work is based on analysing how the city stimulates a force capable of shaping the social world. The way buildings, sidewalks, driveways and highways play an integral part in actively ordering and organising processes that transform the use of the cityscape and shape the subjective identities of urban residents is engaged with through photography, writing and film.

Nolan Oswald Dennis is a (South) African artist and insurgent architectural researcher based in Johannesburg. He studied architecture at the University of Witwatersrand and social sciences at the University of Cape Town. His work explores the interface between hegemonic and emergent spatial-information systems. Using techniques of counter-mapping and re-inscribing, his work aims to locate sites of radical African mirroring, decolonizing reflection, and double, triple and infinite consciousness – techniques to refuse, resist, return or reject the neocolonial gaze. His work focuses on the social threshold between fiction and fact, aiming at corrupting the Western hegemonic monopolization of truth, knowledge and power. His work reasserts an epistemic “we” to neoliberal questions of “I” - the “we” that begins in Africa. His work has been displayed in group exhibitions in Africa and Europe.

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