



Introduction

CHAPTER ONE

Figure 4: **Protests against symbolism in public spaces (Rhodes must fall)** (New African magazine 2016)



1.1. Background

“Public memory is politicised because it is constructed and informed by dominant ideology, so what can we read about the politics of this country through the state’s continuation of a discipline made by, and for colonialists?” (Gamedze 2015). The real world problem is conceived from debates surrounding the issue of landscapes of contestation. These landscapes are said to be symbolic and a representation of the past colonial (and apartheid) era, instead of representing modern city inhabitants. For

this reason, there are calls to decolonise public spaces which were built during the colonial (and apartheid) era (Gamedze 2015). These calls have seen public demonstrations in which protesters demonstrated for the removal of statues in South African public spaces. The issue at hand is about meaning of public spaces for the contemporary city inhabitant. In order to address the issue, the narrative of the current city inhabitants has to be studied because what people are contesting against is essentially the narrative that is being communicated by these spaces. For example, the vandalism of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes at

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the University of Cape Town was a fight against the narrative of colonialism that the statue represented (Kamazi 2015). “Like a language, narrative is a means of communicating” (Potteiger & Purinton 1998:4), therefore, it can be used as a tool in debating meaning, signs and symbols in landscapes of contestation. In their book, *Landscape narratives: design practices for telling stories*, Potteiger and Purinton (1998:11) identified nine types of narrative forms and practices that can be implemented in landscape architecture, which are:

- Narrative experiences
- Associations and references
- Memory landscapes
- Narrative setting and topos
- Genres of landscape narratives
- Processes
- Interpretive landscapes
- Narrative as form generation
- Storytelling landscapes

(Potteiger and Purinton 1998:11)

The position taken in this dissertation falls within the realm of *narrative setting and topos*. This is because this type of narrative focuses on the spatial qualities of a narrative, instead of an interpretive and symbolic approach to communicating the narrative. The idea of implementing a narrative approach by making use of its *components* (story and expression) as a means of design investigation is emphasised in this dissertation. The narrative for design investigation consists of a poetic text that is based on stories of protests in South Africa. It is these stories that need to be communicated through a narrative process.

The design stance of this investigation is that landscape architects should design a setting for the narrative to occur, instead of emphasising the use of narrative for form generation. This stance resembles the work of a scenographer whose job is essentially to communicate information and experiences through a performance or an event (Grondahl 2012:5). It is for this reason that a scenographic approach to communicating narratives (narrative manifests in a performance)

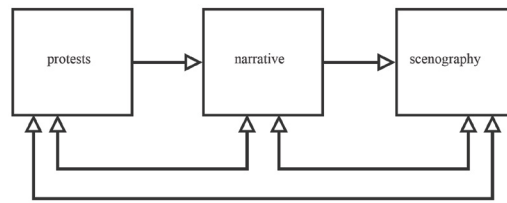


Figure 5: **Research process** (Author 2016)

is investigated and eventually appropriated in the landscape design process.

According to Sofia Pantouvaks, scenography “forms visual and spatial poetics of performance” (Raesch 2010:67). The importance of scenography in theatre is that it conveys spatial qualities and experiences that words cannot express. Space is created through the interaction of the audience, the actors and the performance space to create a performative event (Aronson 2012:19). What sets apart scenography from other spatial disciplines is its potential to create “transformative spatial processes (Aronson 2012:19) and the ability of a scenographer to visualise texts as three dimensional spaces by creating an “illusion of atmosphere” for the audience to experience (Donaldson Selby 2012:2). The purpose of this research is to investigate whether scenography is a valuable tool in offering a new design perspective in landscape architecture.

1.2. Problem statement

The question posed by this dissertation is how do we re-imagine public spaces in South Africa so that they represent the people that are currently inhabiting the city?

1.3. Research question

What scenographic principles on spatial design can be appropriated to landscape architecture in order to design settings for narrative contents to be performed?

1.4. Research Objectives

To understand the design of a landscape from a scenographer’s perspective. To contribute towards the debate on how public spaces can be designed in a democratic South Africa.

1.5. Thesis statement

The research aims to prove that by using

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scenography principles as design informants in communicating a narrative, expressive and poetic spaces in a landscape can be achieved/created.

1.6. Delineations and limitations

Although the departing point of this dissertation is about protests and decolonisation of public spaces, the main focus of the investigation is on using scenography as a means to communicate narrative content in a landscape, of which protests and decolonisation are part of this narrative.

1.7. Methodology

The design process involves the use of abstract marquees and experimental drawings that were done both intuitively and rationally in an attempt to translate scenographic thinking to landscape architecture. The book will consist of these explorations but most of them won't be presented formally as they didn't lead to a final design product but still formed part of the design investigation.

1.8. Definition of terms

Blocking: The process of defining where the most important spaces are in a landscape and designing how people move from each of these spaces based on the design narrative.

Character: The user of a designed landscape or in some cases it might refer to the spatial qualities that distinguish a certain space from a number of other spaces.

Dialogue: The interaction of characters in a designed landscape.

Drama: The human experience of space by either interacting with other humans or interacting with the designed spaces.

Emphasis: Drawing attention to a particular designed element or space.

Mood: Describes how people feel and act in a particular space.

Plot: Events described in a narrative.

Production: The realisation of the narrative into a design product.

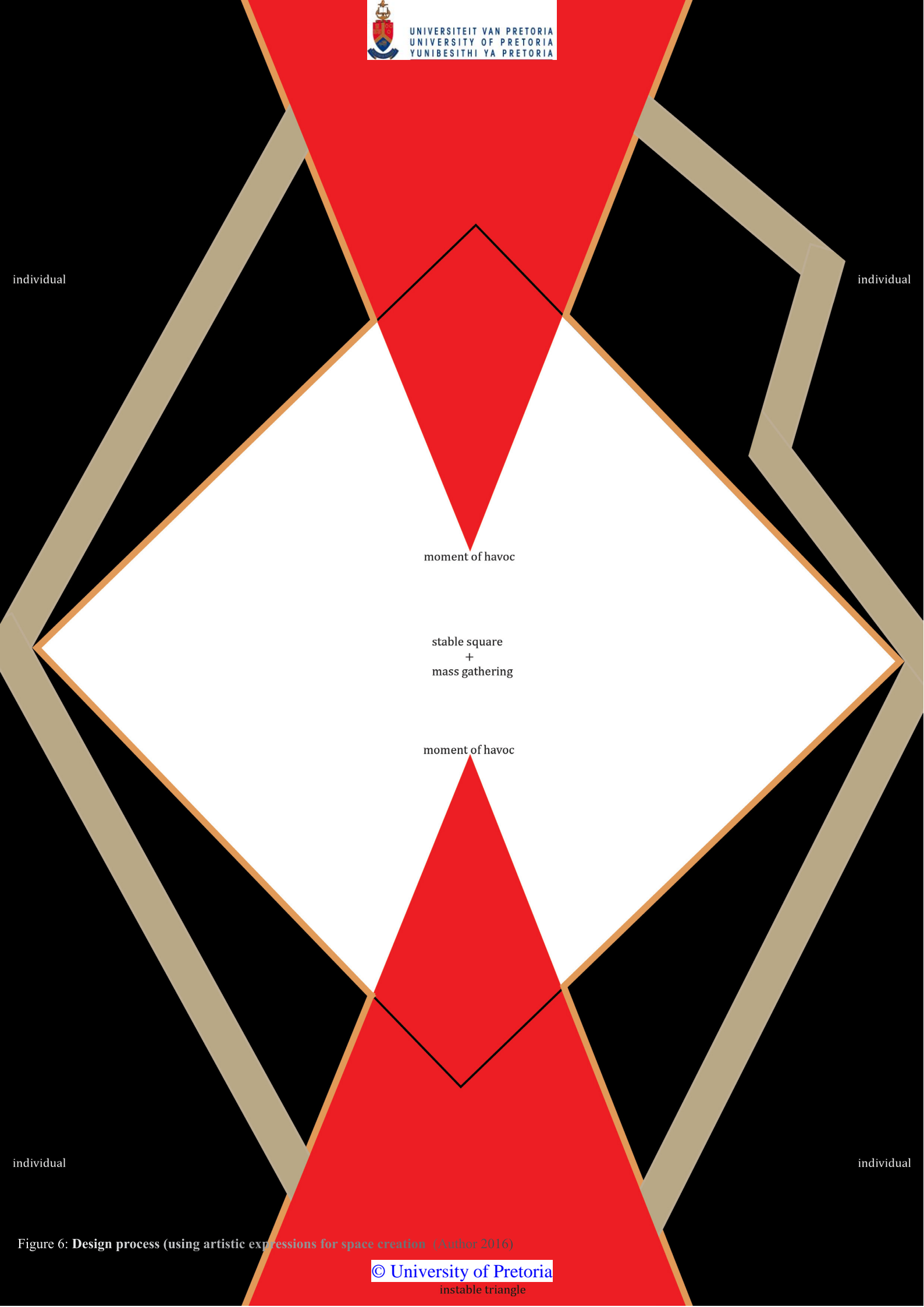
Scene: A moment in a landscape that distinguishes a particular space from the rest of spaces due to its spatial characteristics.

Scenography: The art of communicating verbal and written texts through the design of space.

Setting: A place where the narrative is situated and performed.

Space of performance: Spaces where people interact or act.

(School Curriculum Standards Authority 2012)



individual

individual

moment of havoc

stable square
+
mass gathering

moment of havoc

individual

individual

Figure 6: Design process (using artistic expressions for space creation) (Author 2016)

