The Fall Collective:
***The Making of THE FALL* (2016)**

In this instalment of the Laboratory, Tankiso Mamabolo and Thando Mangcu of South African theatre collective The Fall grant us access into how they conceptualised and devised their compelling first work *The Fall*, which premiered in 2016 and took international stages by storm in 2017.

The Fall Collective was established by seven University of Cape Town students and activists in 2017 as a direct offshoot of the Rhodes Must Fall movement, which toppled the statue of British imperialist Cecil John Rhodes at UCT in 2015 in an effort to also topple the institution's inherent Eurocentricity. They made *The Fall* under the guidance and direction of their lecturer Clare Stopford as the protests occurred, and it was first staged at the Baxter Theatre in the wake of the 2015-16 events.

In this documentary, Mamabolo and Mangcu recount the heat in which the piece was made and the urge that compelled them to make a piece about the demands of the protestors and about aspects of the protests that were being misrepresented in the media. They detail the methods that informed their collective 'writing' process and the historical and conceptual choices underpinning their repertoire of techniques – in order to build both the show and a truly democratic collective. Finally, Mamabolo and Mangcu reflect together on the work's reception at home and worldwide, ask questions about how it continues to resonate in 2020 and about how they will take the experience into their future work: 'it was a very difficult but very fruitful process because I think we were all on the same page when it came to the desperation of exhaling through this piece. I think we all understood why it was necessary'.

[00:00:23 to 00:01:37] Trailer for *The Fall* (2017)

[00:01:40] INTRODUCTIONS

Duška Radosavljević: So hi, Tankiso and Thando! Thank you very much for agreeing to come and talk to us about *The Fall*, the show you made in 2017 at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. You were part of this collective, both of you, and it was interesting that it didn't really specify individual roles because you really worked as an ensemble and you took credit as an ensemble. Could you tell us who you are as individual artists, just for context for this conversation?

Tankiso Mamabolo: My name is Tankiso Mamabolo, and I am a playwright **–** published playwright, award-winning actor, independent musician, recording artist, and I do work that tends to focus on the marginalised, I use my work as a form of protest. I have been active in the theatre and music industry for about five years now, and my role in *The Fall* was that of a writer and an actor.

Thando Mangcu: My name is Thando Mangcu, and I am also a published playwright and I am an actress, studying dramaturgy. I recently finished – well, submitted my dissertation, my master's dissertation in dramaturgy. My work thrives as cross-cultural experimentation and is always a result of collaboration.

DR: Great. Well, thank you, and also thank you for sending us these video clips, these little montage clips you created in preparation for this lab conversation today. I'm now going to play the first clip you sent us, where you tell us a little bit about your influences.

[00:04:06] CREATIVE INFLUENCES

[00:04:08 to 00:07:03] A montage about creative influences with voiceover

Voiceover: *The Fall* is a 2016 award-winning play created in the style of workshop theatre by nine UCT theatre graduates, facilitated by theatre director and their former lecturer, Clare Stopford at UCT's Baxter Theatre. Clare Stopford was our lecturer at the University of Cape Town from 2012 to

2015. She was mentored by Barney Simon in the 1980s. Barney Simon is the pioneer of what we know as South African theatre today. After an education at Wits, he abandoned architecture to practise theatre, working backstage for British theatre director, Joan Littlewood. He came back to South Africa and would create the workshop theatre style with Black actors and would stage his plays at the Market Theatre during apartheid in the 1980s. It was at a staging of *Born in the RSA* that Lara Foot, who would become the CEO of the Baxter Theatre and would produce *The Fall,* decided that she wanted to create a similar kind of storytelling and she thereafter would, like Clare, also be mentored by Simon. It was under the guidance of Clare and Lara that *The Fall* came to be. In challenging the previously white-led director-actor hierarchies, we placed ourselves at the forefront of storytelling; utilising Clare not as a director but as a facilitator and with the theatre-making graduates of the group, Thando Mangcu and Ameera Conrad as curators who would scribe the workshop and edit it later to create coherent scenes. Workshop theatre is the practice of improvising scenes and in this way it is the actors that are authors of the play. Mixing with the indigenous storytelling form that is oral storytelling, working with Black actors like Gcina Mhlophe, John Ledwaba and James Mthoba, Barney Simon-style South African theatre is devised using a workshop process. This form of theatre takes influences from political practitioners like Brecht and the Poor Theatre of Grotowski to create a 'living newspaper' that would communicate to the audience what the mainstream media was keeping from them. Additionally, if you look at plays like *Born in the RSA* and *Black Dog/Inj'emnyama,* the plays can take form as a series of monologues, to create personalised connections with the audience. Close to Stanislavski's 'slice of life' style to break up the monologues, *Black Dog/Inj'emnyama* was the play that started the conversation to create a play like *The Fall,* which, like *Black Dog,* would reflect to the audience the unrest suffered in Black townships, but this time also suffered in the university through institutionalised racism and systematic inequality.

DR: When did you arrive at Cape Town University? And what did you study, what was your programme like, and how did your collaboration with Clare Stopford actually come about?

Thando Mangcu: We both entered – all of us actually – entered UCT drama school in 2012, with myself and Ameera studying theatre-making and Tankiso and the rest of the cast studying acting. Clare was our lecturer throughout, and I think Tankiso can speak more about how the idea for *The Fall* came to be, as she was in the cast of *Black Dog/Inj'emnyama* in the 2015 cast of that play.

Tankiso Mamabolo: So in 2015 during the Rhodes Must Fall movement we were in the process of having a Barney Simon celebration season in our drama school, where they were putting on a bunch of theatre pieces that had been done by Barney Simon, and most of them – actually all of them – were workshopped. During the same time, some of us were going off to occupy and to protest. And so it was a pretty tumultuous time on campus – and we happened to be doing a play about Apartheid South Africa and about a student leader at that time. It was loosely based on Tsietsi Mashinini, who was a student leader during the Soweto Uprising. And so our art and our lives then began to merge, because when we were not protesting, we were playing characters who are protesting. The play became a huge success. Clare Stopford was the director and of course she led the Barney Simon festival because she had worked closely with him and she was a mentee to him. The play became such a success that the Baxter Theatre offered to run it, and that was our very first professional run as young actors who were completing our final year. When the play was on at the Baxter, the Baxter's Lara Foot was also thinking of a way to start supporting the conversation with the students, and to open the Baxter up to these conversations and to lend a hand, because during apartheid, the Baxter was one of the only theatres that was integrated. So I think she wanted to continue that tradition of being progressive and of showcasing young Black people's voices. After we graduated, we decided to create this collective that would write work, but we weren't quite sure what kind of work we wanted to make but we knew that we wanted it to speak about the issues we were facing. At the same time we could no longer be on campus protesting because we'd be arrested for trespassing. Luckily, at the same time, Lara Foot and the Baxter were also thinking of collaborating with us because they had seen us in *Black Dog* and they liked the synergy that we had as a group. So a meeting was had with the Baxter Theatre where they pitched this idea to us and we said: 'Well, that's amazing because we've just started this collective. We want to be doing work that matters. We want

to be speaking about what is happening currently.' One of our main motivations was that the media was releasing all these articles and we were like: 'We were *there*, we know what's happening. We are direct links to the movement.' And so we came together. Clare was the natural choice to be facilitator because we knew her, she had a relationship with the Baxter, she had been our lecturer for four years, and she knew the style of theatre very well. It just became this amazing organic process where we were given space, we were given time. And we came together, we told the story, we transcribed it – and *The Fall* happened!

DR: Great. Actually I want to stay a little bit longer with your days at UCT just to understand what you said, that this is a drama school and that obviously you were on different courses that were geared towards specifically an acting career in Tankiso's case and playwriting career in Thando's case. But you presumably knew each other even before you started collaborating on *The Fall.*

Tankiso Mamabolo: We literally met in our first class of university and we just instinctively gravitated towards each other as a group. The most amazing thing about *The Fall* is that we were actually a very close group of friends who spent a *lot* of time together. Before the process, some of us had lived together, some of us shared food on campus, we sang songs on campus. So when we created the collective we were already a close-knit group of friends.

Thando Mangcu: Even in going to protest, we would always go with this like clump of UCT drama school people. So we always just were around each other.

DR: How many people were on each of your respective courses? How many actors, how many playwrights? And what were the other courses at the school that you collaborated with?

Tankiso Mamabolo: When we were in drama school, I think they took about 25 to 30 people into the course. In the middle of first year we start splitting up. So Thando and Ameera and I, we still had some classes together – theory classes we all had together. They were still working as actors in our first year and a little bit of our second year, but our acting class was left with – because some people drop out, some people go to other courses – maybe about 13 to 15 actors, and I think Thando's class had five theatre-makers. Five or six?

Thando Mangcu: Yes, we had five.

Tankiso Mamabolo: So our course was, we learned a lot about European directors like Brecht and – oh, those names just flashed. Thando's the theory person in this room! [*Laughter.*] But we also did a lot of work in South African theatre. So we were already studying workshop theatre, we were already studying different styles of community theatre in the country. Our course also involved us learning about stage managing, costume, design, lighting, sound… Yes, it was a whole lot. Musical theatre as well at some point.

Thando Mangcu: And the theatre-makers got to experience going to the Grahamstown Arts Festival. Like every year – I'm not sure if they still do it now, because a lot has changed now; it's like the Centre for Theatre – it's C.T.D.P.S., which combines dance and drama now. That happened after we left. But when I was there, every year, in your final year you have the opportunity to create a play that will be staged at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival. So in that way you're exposed to the festival environment and you are given the opportunity to make your own work. So as theatre-makers, we had a bit of experience in that.

DR: Great. I'm sorry, I realised that I misnamed your course, Thando, as a playwriting course, but it was called a course in theatre-making, right?

Thando Mangcu: Yes.

DR: What does that mean, theatre-making, what was your training in as a theatre-maker?

Thando Mangcu: Theatre-making involved many aspects of stagecraft, and it involved dramaturgy, actual stagecraft – so looking at lighting and costume. It involved choreography, object theatre, also object theatre meaning like puppetry…

Tankiso Mamabolo: Directing…

Thando Mangcu: Yes, thank you! [*Laughter.*] And in our final year we really got to utilise our

workshop theatre style. So we were led by Mark Fleishman and Clare Stopford in our final year in terms of dramaturgy and directing.

DR: I just wanted to hear a bit more from you about how those Western European influences that inform your training were finding an African response within your training before this happened. In your first clip, you talked about all these influences of Grotowski and Brecht and Stanislavski and so on. But then at the very end of the clip, you talked about how you were finding an African response to those foundational kind of influences that inform your training. I was remembering that when I was hearing you speak and when Tankiso said about how you were singing on campus, because that's another thing I'm really interested in, this idea of the oral tradition that Africa is very rich in so many different ways: the oral storytelling, the singing and the form that then informed the making of *The Fall* itself. What do you perceive as being ways in which the curriculum was or was not starting to be decolonised before your show?

Tankiso Mamabolo: Well, firstly, there was a certain attitude when it came to things like protest theatre. Because we are situated in South Africa, as a South African I would expect practices by my own people to be the main source of my curriculum. But for a long time Shakespeare, Brecht, Grotowski, Stanislavski were hailed as the main people. And, I guess it also has to do with a lack of archiving, which is something that also led us to writing *The Fall*. We have so many great creators and theatre-makers and philosophers in South Africa whose work disappeared or whose work exists without credit because [it was] unlike the European guys' – they wrote, they were archived and they were scholars. But this was a big struggle for especially the Black students on campus because these worlds were not so easy for us to access. I mean, we could do it. We could do research, we could become it, but there was always a bit of tension, because we felt that there was very little pride instilled in us about the African theatre-makers that had created an amazing work. Over time – and I think some of our lecturers actually also supported this – over time they began inserting a lot more. And in spaces where we couldn't actually find plays or scripts by African writers, we were then given the freedom to create our own or to adapt these European works – because sometimes they wouldn't fit in our context. But I will give credit to the drama school. I think it's also because artists, in my opinion, happen to be [more] progressive than everyone else. So when our campus started hearing the call for change, as slow as it was, there was a bit of consideration given to Black students. There was also a class called 'Nguni', where it was just a class with the Black students who spoke African languages to be able to do plays in their languages and not always have to do them in English. So certainly, there has been a change – very slowly, but there's a lot more pride and a lot more space given to stories by African storytellers.

DR: And Thando, from the perspective of someone – a dramaturg now, a professional dramaturg – is there another kind of perception of this that you know that you might have gained on this move towards decolonisation in the last few years before and after your show?

Thando Mangcu: Do you mean on campus?

DR: Yes.

Thando Mangcu: I haven't been on campus in a while, maybe two years, and coming back as a master's student after having left in 2015 I would say that there has been significant change in terms of decolonising the curriculum. When I went back to UTC drama school it was now – I really need to get the acronym correct **–** but basically the drama school was accepting more people and you could choose later on what subject you want to do, which gives you a bit more choice and it also allows you to know about different theatrical artforms. It's not as streamlined as before, where you had to know that you were doing a certain facet of theatre and stick with it and that is your streamline. So I think by combining all of those forms, I think that's a way of also decolonising because it's about sharing knowledge rather than being in your own little bubble or line of expertise.

Tankiso Mamabolo: And it's also called the Centre for Theatre, Dance and Performance Studies. I just googled it. [*Laughter.*]

[00:23:41] HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

[00:23:43 to 00:26:42] A documentary montage about the Cape Town student activist movements in 2015-16

Voiceover: The play tracks the rise of student activism beginning with Rhodes Must Fall, Afrophobia Must Fall, Fees Must Fall and ending at the beginning of 2016 with Shackville. Rhodes Must Fall was a protest movement that began on the 9th of March, 2015. Contrary to popular belief, the call to have the statue removed had been heard many times before on campus, and there were many Black and queer led groups on campus dedicated to speaking our against institutionalised racism, the lack of transformation in the curriculum, which was very Eurocentric at the time, the lack of Black professors amongst other issues faced by marginalised students on campus. The unrest however began when Chumani Maxwele, a student at the University of Cape Town, staged a protest where he threw human faeces at the statue, prompting the university to charge and suspend him for his actions. Students and groups on campus then rallied around him and used the call for the falling of the statue as a symbol for the falling of the toxic, colonial culture at the university. The students were calling for the campus to be decolonised. After the falling of the statue, protests continued because many of the problems stemming from the toxic culture at the university were still not being addressed. Many different occupations took place on campus and protests became more and more violent with the introduction of police on campus. Later on in the year, the government announced a university fee increase that would see many already struggling Black students unable to afford to study, and some getting financially excluded from the university. Student protests erupted again and this time, almost every university in South Africa experienced similar protests and occupations on their campuses, leading to a march to Parliament in Cape Town later that year that turned very violent with many activists being arrested and charged with treason – a charge that was later dropped. From that point onwards, there was a rise of police presence at universities and some campuses even hired private security firms who were notorious for brutalising protesters and using force. In the beginning of 2016, a housing crisis at the University of Cape Town caused another series of protests where students clashed with police and private security. Black students who had travelled from across the country arrived to find that they were not placed at residences, while wealthier predominantly white students, who were mostly from Cape Town and the surrounding areas ,were given first preference. The movement built a shack on campus which was symbolic of the struggle for housing and the poverty most of the homeless students came from.

DR: Amazing evocative imagery there, thank you for this. What are your memories of this time? You were at the time in 2015 in your third year – oh, fourth year. Do you remember the 9th of March? Where were you on the 9th of March when you heard this was happening?

Tankiso Mamabolo: This is funny because this is one of the questions we asked ourselves as we were creating this play. Our drama campus is pretty far from the main campus, you have to travel by bus. There had been a little bit of a strange energy on campus, and we had been attending these talks for a couple of months prior where students were beginning to discuss their grievances with the university. We used to attend one at this residence on Lower Campus where it was just a group of Black students coming together to share their experiences, to share history, to share opinions on what needs to be done. I remember that we were on campus – the thing with drama students is we don't have lives, everything of ours is there – and I remember we all were very sweaty coming from a movement class holding our yoga mats and someone showed us a video of what was happening on Upper Campus. The video showed us after Chumani had thrown the poo onto the statue and the students who had gathered to support him in his protest. Instinctively we knew that something big was about to happen. We knew. I remember itching to get out of our campus. I was just like: 'I don't want to be here. That's where I want to be right now because there's a conversation happening there that I need to be a part of.' Thando will elaborate, but I'm not sure if it was the same afternoon or the next afternoon that the students then – because he was then arrested for what he had done and they said: 'You know what, we're charging you and we're suspending you', and immediately students started gathering outside the administration building. I remember running home to go write on a board quickly because I needed to somehow have some form of protest material there. It all went

very quickly from then on with students saying: 'Firstly, we want you to drop the charges against him. We want you to reverse the suspension. And we need you to tell us when you're removing that statue, because now we're actually all demanding that you remove the statue.' Management was a bit strange with giving us an answer, they were running around in circles. And then the students said: 'Well, we will occupy this building.' So management didn't get a chance to prepare. It went from a picket to: 'We're entering because you're not giving us the answers that we need.' And then we entered the building and sang for hours and hours and hours and hours. It was just this incredibly euphoric moment where everyone felt like what they had been feeling for the amount of years that they were there was being aired out. It was put out into the open and people who had seen each other on campus who didn't really even know each other were forming friendships in that group. I just remember it was very hot in there, everyone was sweating, and, yes, it was just a really, really amazing moment. And from then on, we started having meetings, making demands.

Thando Mangcu: I remember on that first afternoon, it was a Friday and the theatre-makers had been – we had been showcasing our adaptations, adapting South African or African plays, so it was like our showcase weekend. As a theatre-maker I remember going between the two. Just to speak on this thing of theatre-makers and drama students not having a life. It was like leading a double life almost because you were at the drama campus and then you're like: 'Oh my gosh, I need to get back to the main campus where this is happening.' I also remember a week before that, there was also the State of the Nation address. I don't know if it was the very first time, but it was one of the first times that the E.F.F. had done a performative protest inside Parliament.

DR: E.F.F. stands for?

Thando Mangcu & Tankiso Mamabolo [*in unison*]: Economic Freedom Fighters. [*Laughter.*]

Thando Mangcu: For me as a theatre-maker, I found that so exciting. Not that I at the time agreed necessarily with their politics, but I just found that performative energy so exciting. The fact that they were disrupting a space wearing working-class clothes and just disrupting the whole grand State of the Nation address. For it to then happen again on campus where I could access it, I found that pretty exciting.

DR: I'll now move to the next clip you sent us, which is about the making of *The Fall*.

[00:32:49] MAKING PROCESS

[00:32:52 to 00:38:45] A montage about the making of *The Fall*

Voiceover: As theatre graduates who could no longer play a big role in protests on campus, we decided to collaborate with the Baxter Theatre to create a piece that would shine a light on the parts of the student protests that were missing or misrepresented in the media. We understood the need for support from the rest of the country, but we also understood that we needed to use our platform to educate audiences and to archive the events of 2015 as young, Black theatre makers and so we began working on the play in March of 2016. With the assistance of Clare Stopford, we began by using devices such as poetry, music and movement to access the stories from within ourselves. We journaled and used improvisation to recreate some of the bigger plenary scenes that are shown in the play. This was done with the help of research, video footage and sometimes from memory. Going in, we decided on a 40:60% split, where 60% of our characters were our own experiences, and 40% were experiences borrowed from other people in the movement who we had observed as the archetypal characters who symbolised the differences and the diversity of the students within the movement and the people who led many of the conversations that took place. Each character represented a different struggle, such as hyper-masculinity, the fight for trans rights, queer rights, discrimination in sports in the country, and feminism. We wanted to highlight the conversations that took place within those spaces that pushed the movement to make certain decisions. We also wanted to combat some of the stories in the media that were calling the students 'entitled', 'violent', and 'disorganised'. These stories failed to show the peaceful protests that were often disrupted by the police, where students had to defend themselves and each other, the intimidation the students were subjected to and the desperation that led many of us to join the protests. The stories failed to

highlight the intellectual work that was happening within the movement such as lectures from prominent Black writers and professors from the across the country, the money raised for students struggling with their fees, with basic needs like food and toiletries, educational materials that were shared online, art pieces and music that were created by students in the movement, financially excluded students who were allowed back at the university with the help of the SRC and activists from the movement, and the many meetings student leaders sat in to discuss the issues with management. In creating this play we had three goals: to answer the question of why we went to protest, to humanise the people involved in the movement to the audience, and to let the audience into the moments in the movement, that they had not had access to – like the vulnerability of the students, the support structures that were created in those spaces, the conversations and the meetings that were had. We needed people to make informed judgements about the movement while being honest about the movement's achievements and shortcomings. At the beginning of the year, in 2016, there were still protests that were happening on campus. This made us hyper-aware of what we were bringing to the story. The university was shut down, and the theatre we worked in is based at the university, but the movement allowed us to enter and to devise this play. We could hear stun grenades happening all around us, students screaming and police sirens. While it was difficult to continue while we knew what was going on outside, we understood the importance of creating this play and of telling this story. The media was from specific perspectives that were driving a certain narrative that we found unfair and which we wanted to balance out. [*Segment of rehearsal footage featuring Sizwe Mnisi.*] The workshop theatre process allowed us to improvise and to unpack what we had experienced the year before at the protests. It allowed us to play, and to write poetry. The first thing we had to do was to see ourselves as storytellers first, as theatre-makers, and as individuals, rather than as members of the movement. This movement was such a big movement that one of our biggest fears was telling a story from our biases instead of telling the truth. Our main purpose was to factually be on point. A lot of what you saw on stage really happened. We understood that there were so many people represented in the movement that it would be impossible to have each and every voice present in this play. We tracked the movement back and we found the people that had the most prominent voices at very pivotal moments within the movement. These were the voices that led the conversation and that were sometimes seen as controversial. These people then became characters that we chose, which then became representative of groups of people. Through character dynamics we included opinions and backgrounds that differed.

DR: So this is such a rich section actually where you outlined, the ways in which you were responding to the deficiencies of the media representation of the actual protests and the different struggles that were at the core of the protest itself that maybe weren't coming across to the public, your goals and the actual process of making the piece. There are so many ways in which we can take this conversation further, I'd love to talk to you about it for hours. For the first thing, I just want to try and get an idea of how long was your process of developing this piece and what were the phases of development, if you like. Did you start with the workshops from the very beginning and then started to work towards the version of the finished piece in an integrated way? Or was it divided into any phases along the way?

Thando Mangcu: It started with a month-long writing process. I think it was three weeks that we were writing and then the last – or we wrote for like a full four weeks and then had a sort of written product or written play by the end of that four weeks. I'm now giving just the overall thing, there are details within that month that can be elaborated on. So first there was a month of writing, with a sort of rough script or rudimentary script, then later in September that's when 'how to stage it' became our focus. Then it would be staged in October. So it was basically two separate months.

DR: The research that you mentioned at the end of this clip about amplifying those voices and making them representative of the protest as a whole, was that folded into the writing process? At what point did you actually start to get those testimonies? And what did you do with those testimonies of the people whose voices you're using?

Tankiso Mamabolo: We were pretty much there from the beginning of the movement, so a lot of the research we did was fact-checking and less of: 'Hey, sit down, let's…', because we were in such

close contact with these people. I chaired some meetings with these people, I lived with some of these people, so we came in already having a really good memory of what had happened. But there were instances where we had to fact-check, for instance when we spoke about the trans collective. Because none of us in the collective are trans, we had to respectfully go and fact-check and let them see a bit of what we had written, to see if it was aligned with what their struggles had been at the time. Interestingly enough, part of our research came after the fact when we opened the play up to the students. So after our very first run, they came, there was a Q&A, they were able to voice out. And a lot of them were like: 'Oh my gosh, I recognise who that person was, that was me, that was so and so.' But most of our research went into different people's experiences of racism in the university. Luckily, those accounts could be found online. People were sharing during that time so we didn't always have to go to people and say: 'Hey, do you mind sharing that story that you shared that one time?' People were writing poetry, people were making videos, we had lots and lots of footage from meetings, so a lot of the words that you get are words that were said by someone else. I remember Tsietsi says something about: 'You have to be violent with a system that is violent with you', and those lines were sent by a friend of mine and we had a clip of that. So a lot of it was just conversations that we had with people. When it came to representing people, it wasn't really a formal process, it was just us going: 'We remember this meeting, we remember these were the points that were made.' Also, because we played a huge role in the movement, we had footage and we had notes that we had written down during meetings. We didn't go to people and just go: 'Is this factually correct, is this what you said, is what you believe? You don't feel like you have been misrepresented?' That's why we also made a choice to not focus on one person at a time. The characters that you see are representative of multiple people at the same time so that, just like the movement, we try and not highlight one person's voice. It was research done in many, many, many different ways.

DR: When you say the 'writing process', was that research process part of the writing?

Tankiso Mamabolo: Oh, I didn't answer that! The first thing we did was we wrote a full-scale tracking of the movement. We sat down and we wrote what we remember from the beginning of the inception of the movement to the little movements that happened in between. And we decided this is the story we were going to tell from the 9th of March to February of 2016. And from then on, we started doing poetry-writing because we also had to locate our own voices and not just amplify other people's voices. We had to take some sort of stance and figure out the angle we'd be creating this play from. So we spent maybe two weeks of that process with Clare facilitating poetry workshops with us, movement workshops. The clip that you see of Sizwe was us speaking about what institutionalised racism makes you feel like, what does it mean when you say: 'I can't breathe, I can't speak', because that was a slogan that was used by the movement at that time. Sizwe is a dancer, he's physical theatre, he's a beautiful dancer, so his way of expressing that was through movement with us using music and poetry at the same time. We would take texts and turn it into song, we would take text and turn it into dance, turn it into movement, turn it into mime pieces, and then we would choose from that. When the writing process finally came about, we had that timeframe that we had written down, we had the different bits of poetry that we had written. We also had gone through improvising certain scenes, like the medical plenary scene, those were events that actually happened but we needed to dramatise them. So we wrote down the actual things that are set on that day and we added some of our own lines. Thando and Ameera were curators, so they wrote that down and when we had all of these little pieces of writing that we had done, we came together and we just went crazy.

Thando Mangcu: Even with the connecting songs in the play, in terms of research that was something that we also consulted people with, because there were people in the movement–

Tankiso Mamabolo: Oh yeah!

Thando Mangcu: –that knew a lot about the songs, what they meant, the history of them. So there were people that could really also help us with the theory of the music that was used, which would then connect each of the scenes.

Tankiso Mamabolo: Some of the slogans that we used, some of the hand gestures as well, they came from some of these people that we met but they also came from old South African freedom

fighters who had created this shorthand to communicate their desires, to communicate their missions. These became integrated in the movement, and then they became integrated in the play as well. So we had to go and ask them: 'What exactly does this mean, and is it offensive in any way? Is it…? Is it...?'

DR: If I understand correctly, you first of all had the experience of being in the protest and collecting all that footage of the people involved and so on. Then you moved into the writing phase where the poetry writing happened within the writing phase. And then later on in October, as you said, Thando, you started working towards finding the stagecraft for the finished version. But the writing process itself, to what extent was it a process of improvisation – as in writing in space, writing with your bodies, the way which Sizwe does in that scene? And to what extent was it the actual process of writing with a pen on the page? You say in that clip, very interestingly, that you estimate that the split between research and personal memories was 60% personal memories, 40% research. Are you able to quantify to what extent your writing process was actually improvisation and to what extent it was the scripting of words?

Thando Mangcu: From what I know from the process as far as scripting goes, I think most of the process was improvisation, like remembering what happened, trying to remember what people have said, as Tankiso said earlier. A lot of that was verbal speaking and then myself and Ameera made it into – we basically transcribed. There was no thing of playwright or a person making an executive decision to have it this way. It was basically throughout a transcription of our workshopping or our improvising. Some of it was then speckled with things that we had written individually. For example, I had written a poem about Rhodes Falling. That wasn't improvised – I had written it the night before and I came with it to rehearsal – and the same with a few of the other monologues that other cast members had made. I think for the longer texts, those were texts that we had individually written. Some were even chopped and combined with another piece of long text from someone else. And then the more dialogue parts, those were the parts that were transcribed from improvisations.

Tankiso Mamabolo: But even the improvisations happened mostly when it came to plenary scenes, group scenes – but it was improvisation within a given frame. For instance, when we talk about the medical plenary, we can say these are the types of conversations that we had at that meeting, we can clearly remember some of the shocking things that were said by people. So we absolutely know that we had to have this in there because that was a game changer for the conversation. I chaired the meeting so I remember how I resolved that meeting and so we kept that. Then the rest becomes representations of other many voices. My favourite part was definitely the monologue writing because most of the parts where we get to address the audience directly, those are our bits. Those are things that are personally what we feel about what we're doing. But group scenes and scenes that take place within the meetings of the movement are mostly things that were said then that might just be summarised or dramatised a little bit.

DR: Given that you worked as a collective and you worked with Clare as well, but you have consciously stated that this piece is the result of collective effort, did you have any particular methodology of developing this piece that helped you maintain that democratic way of working, i.e. not having a single person make decisions? What was your methodology for developing the piece in this democratic way that ensured that you were moving from one stage to another and the decisions were being made in some way?

Tankiso Mamabolo: We fought a lot. [*Laughter.*] There were many, many, many fights. Everything happened with a vote, everything had to be discussed until it could no longer be discussed. If you were suggesting something you had to back up why you were suggesting that thing, why it would work better than someone else's suggestion. Our main focus was firstly we decided that we were not going to be propaganda for the movement. We were going to tell the truth, we were to tell our truth. We were going to focus on parts of the movement that people didn't get to see. So our opinions about the movement didn't really matter, what mattered was our individual experiences as Black students in the university. So everything was a democracy, there were votes, there was thorough research done. It was a very difficult but very fruitful process because I think we were all on the same page when it came to the desperation of exhaling through this piece. I think we all understood why it

was necessary, we all understood that. I remember I wanted the piece to be incredibly feminist, and the guys were like: 'Well, we support that, but it has to be truthful…' When someone else would want their own little politics or whatever to enter, then everyone else will be there to reel them back in and go: 'Actually that's not what happened. What actually happened? What is the truth of the matter?' Clare was also very good at understanding that, you know: we're young and we're angry and we are very driven but also this is theatre, this is theatre. I remember my final monologue, the version I first wrote was very different. It was very aggressive and very angry, and as a cast we sat down and people were like: 'You know what, we get it, but how do you want people to leave after watching this show?' So then I went home and I rewrote it, and eventually everyone was happy with it. Similarly with Thando's monologue. So it was a very nurturing, very supportive, very democratic process.

Thando Mangcu: A small but I think important part of it was the fact that Clare would no longer be regarded as a 'director' formally in this process but as a 'facilitator'. That was the thing that also made it a very democratic process because we were co-creating the play and were empowered as actors and as writers to share, rather than just relying on a director. It was very useful as well because Clare was the one who is experienced in Barney Simon's workshop theatre, so she was able to help us translate our experiences.

Tankiso Mamabolo: Another helpful thing was that we had to understand firstly our definitions of everything in the beginning. So we all had to understand, be on the same page about what institutionalised racism is, what transphobia is. So the definitions of everything had to be on point so that our focus would then be on telling the truth instead of debating these little meanings and stuff.

DR: Tankiso, earlier you said how you drew more material from having the Q&As with the audience and presenting your work to them in terms of how they were responding to what you had developed in rehearsals. At what point did those Q&As happen and how did that experience of sharing with an audience then inform the next stage of developing the piece?

Tankiso Mamabolo: When we finished the play and we put it on for the first time, we were not under the impression that our work was done. We had decided that we had a first draft, and it's ready and we're going to show it. We had Q&As in that first run of *The Fall*, mostly because we knew it would have the students who were at the forefront of the movement. So what would happen is that we always reviewed the script. I remember at some point we had so many different versions of the script, no one knew what the latest version was – it was very frustrating. But you know, we were constantly in contact with each other. I remember we once took a decision to not mention a name in the script, because this person was quite controversial and we were worried we would look like we were in support of them. But they were an important part of the story and they had to be mentioned. I met up with a friend of mine who had watched the play, who said: 'Well, If you're going to mention other people's names, you have to mention this person's name because it's the truth. No one is going to look at you guys like you are supporting that person's politics – because then you're supporting everyone's politics, if that's the case.' So we went back and that day I said to everyone: 'This is the feedback I got. What do we all think about this?' Everyone said: 'Yes, yes, we agree.' Sometimes it would have to do with a certain song or the portrayal of something, but the feedback we got was never so big that we had to change huge parts of the play. It was only when it came to the highlighting of certain situations, how long each subject would be given attention or the name thing or the songs or the meanings of things. Not to pat myself on the shoulder, but we worked really, really, really hard to present something to people that we would be proud of and that they would be proud of, as well. And yes, a lot of the feedback we got was: 'Oh, that was great. Why wasn't I in it?' – you know, jokingly.

DR: I wonder, do you feel that your work in any way expands the story of what documentary theatre has done so far? You've mentioned at the beginning of your presentation how you took inspiration from living newspaper type of theatre and, of course, we've all kind of experienced a lot of verbatim theatre in the last 20 years and it's been done differently in different contexts and so on. I was quite struck – and we will see this in the next clip – by the way in which this piece was described in Edinburgh as 'singing truth to power' and also another description was that it was an 'important theatrical document'. Have you had a chance to reflect on to what extent your particular methodology

of working with real-life events and historical events in a theatre format might have reinvented this or added to this heritage and this legacy of documentary theatre in any way?

Tankiso Mamabolo: Yes, I have. I remember when we were doing this we didn't really have that in mind, we weren't really aware of the hugeness, I guess, of writing and creating something while it is happening. I remember people kept complimenting us: 'Oh wow, you guys have created this piece, and I can literally go to campus and see this thing happening now. How do you feel?' At the time it was quite traumatic because while we were creating this piece we were still hearing police sirens and stun grenades, but I do definitely think that we set the bar a bit high in that people still had access to the feeling. It wasn't nostalgia, it was life, you know. It wasn't: 'Oh, I'm going to go research this.' I guess it also allowed the feeling of validation to the people involved at that time to see themselves archived and to see themselves represented. But it also forced the people who are on the opposing side to deal with it – especially rich theatre-goers who don't really have to deal with that sort of thing – for us to go: 'Not only are we invading your space on this campus, but we are invading your happy date night with this play that is calling your attention to what is happening, literally ten feet away from where we are right now.' Yes, I think it shook a lot of people. It forced us to come to terms with the exact time we were living in. And I think it even forced us to be even more truthful. I'm very obsessed with watching documentaries, especially historical documentaries, but I always get this uneasy feeling of who's telling the story, how long after the events do they tell the story, who told them about this? They have had enough time to reflect and form an opinion, whereas when we did this we were forming our opinions as we were going. We didn't realise that at the time, but it was something massive.

DR: Thando, do you have anything to add to this?

Thando Mangcu: I'm on the same thing – I think that you don't realise how different your work is because you're also really eager to make something. The reception we got was quite eye-opening because of our process as well. We made something very unique.

DR: Let's look at the next clip. The final clip which is about the reception of the piece.

[01:05:52] CRITICAL RECEPTION

[01:05:57 to 01:07:06] A montage about the critical reception and international touring

Voiceover: The reception was incredible. For the first few performances, students could watch the play for free and we included a Q&A in our first performance. The play was very successful from its first run, even though there was a bit of pushback from older white South African theatre-goers, or from people that still felt that the movement didn't have the right to be protesting and to occupy and to be holding marches. It went on the Edinburgh festival where it won awards, it went to New York where it was put on the *New York Times* Critics' Choice list, it won a Fleur du Cap at home, it travelled to Australia, it travelled to Ireland, to France, and to Washington DC. While there was some trauma in re-living those moments over and over again, we understood that there is also protest in art and that our stories need to be heard, not only to be a mirror for the people that were there, but also to counter the tradition of Black stories being told by people that did not experience them. We were able to represent, to teach and to archive our Black experience.

DR: There was something specific that struck me in this last clip and that was this notion of reliving the trauma over and over again but at the same time gaining a sense of doing good work in terms of educating people, telling your own stories and so on. So how does it resolve itself? Does the trauma lessen through telling it over and over again? Or what place does it have in terms of the legacy created through this piece of work?

Thando Mangcu: I think as theatre-makers we've had the unique opportunity of off-loading our trauma, to deal with what we cannot see into something that we can see and that is tangible and know the scene is expressing how we feel about a certain thing. So I think as people that were involved in the protest the year before, to be able to release all of that trauma into an outlet was quite a unique experience. I think that in terms of the legacy, even though you do repeat the trauma on

stage every evening, it is better than being stuck in your head about the trauma. So that's my view.

Tankiso Mamabolo: I also think over time, trauma begins to sit in a different place in your body depending on how exposed you are to it and how much of it you allow to govern. In the beginning of the process, I found it extremely difficult to perform this piece. It was very emotional and very taxing for me but I also understood that it was a decision that I had made, so protesting every day is also traumatising, it's also very traumatic. And I have the understanding that either way, any way that I choose to deal with this will be traumatic because I am passionate about this topic, so I can't avoid the trauma. So there was a giving in for me of it. Doing this piece with people who were there with me during the movement. It allowed for us to bond and for us to feel safe together. We worked the trauma into our preparation process. Before going on stage we sang certain songs that activated something in us a certain strength. We had what we call a 'twerk party' before every show where we played music that was very far from what we were talking about. We played Beyoncé, we played a lot of hip hop, to just get our bodies out of that moment for a little bit. After the show we spent a lot of time together, going out, having drinks, having a chat. I think for me, what helped me with the trauma was seeing how impactful telling the story was. I remember at some point I was struggling to cry at the end – because in my final monologue I'm supposed to cry. I realised that my body was starting to get used to it and as great as that was, it now meant that my performance was beginning to suffer. As a performer, we now also had to find the balance between completely throwing yourself into this thing dangerously and balancing being an actor and being an activist. So it gave us time to work on our technique. It's dangerous to be completely and utterly open every single night, you know. Sometimes you have to decide that this is enough now. You understand the trauma, you nurse the trauma, you nurture it, you put it to bed. And now you are acting, you are performing and it's still close to your heart, but you're not reliving it, you are out of it. Over time, there were certain nights where, for instance when we travelled to America, being very aware of what happens in America I would feel more triggered than some nights. Australia as well was similar, I felt more connected. And so the trauma began changing form. Sometimes it would be empathy, an overwhelming amount of empathy for the people you are performing for. Or gratefulness. Sometimes it would be survivor's guilt because a lot of the people we protested with couldn't go back to school, a lot of them. My friend ended up in a mental institution and I was travelling the world doing this play. So it's something that changes form all the time that you constantly have to be aware of, that you have to work with. But the point of what I'm saying is that the group of people that I had with me during this process made it so much easier to handle because I didn't have to explain myself. We all understood that for us this isn't a musical about love, it was something that was very real and necessary, and it was a calling and a form of protest.

DR: That's beautiful. Thank you very much. I wanted to ask for the end, although this felt like a very conclusive moment, so maybe we can keep it here, but what happened next, what are your plans, as the Fall Collective moving on from *The Fall,* the piece itself?

Tankiso Mamabolo: I'm talking so much, Thando, I'm sorry! One thing that we've always retained is our individuality. So while we understand that we are a part of a collective and we do this great work together, we also understand the need to live and be happy and not be an activist by virtue of being Black and young. We want to do love stories, we want to do… At the at the moment, we're still very much doing our individual work. I am working on my music at the moment, I'm also working on a couple of other productions. I know Thando is really deep in her MA, Sizwe is currently doing film, he's being a leading man, Ameera is lecturing in London. So we're still very much in contact, we're just taking some much needed distance from the topic – and [for] growth.

DR: Thando, any final parting shots about this piece?

Thando Mangcu: I don't think there's anything to add. I think it's been great being able to engage in the process and answering any questions about the movement because it also helps to be able to see what has happened in theory, and as part of a bigger theatre backdrop or development. I appreciate the fact that we've been able to unpack our process.

DR: Just out of interest, actually, as you were speaking I was thinking, I found myself feeling curious about what you did for your MA dissertation. What did you work on?

Thando Mangcu: My MA dissertation, the title was 'The Staging of Black Consciousness through Sound or the Tactical Benefits of Disappearing'. I was problematising the politics of visibility – visibility of Black bodies specifically, stemming from the idea that as a Black body, either you are invisible or you're hyper-visible and there's no in between, and then looking at it musically, how musically you can make yourself visible.

DR: Well, thank you. I really appreciate your contribution, your multi-faceted contribution to this!

Transcription by Nick Awde

Clips Summary

[00:00:23 to 00:01:37] Trailer for *The Fall* (2017)

[00:04:08 to 00:07:03] A montage about creative influences with voiceover

[00:23:43 to 00:26:42] A documentary montage about the Cape Town student activist movements in 2015-16

[00:32:52 to 00:38:45] A montage about the making of *The Fall*

[01:05:57 to 01:07:06] A montage about the critical reception and international touring

Audio available at www.auralia.space/laboratory2-thefallcollective/.

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