



FYNBOS FUTURES

A Speculative Re-imagining
of the Cape Flats

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Fynbos Futures

A speculative Re-imagining of the Cape Flats

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It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories.

- Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 35

Abstract



Emerging from a world entangled in climate and socio-political crisis, this thesis situates itself within the neo-colonial city of Cape Town, where the legacies of colonialism and apartheid planning have alienated the Cape Flats territory from the rest of the city. The Cape Flats is both a site of urban inequality and home to the critically endangered Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, a biome unique to the city, that faces unprecedented extinction due to urbanisation. Through this entanglement of city and urban nature, the thesis examines the intersections of urban space, political ecologies and marginalised histories. Through the project of this thesis, the degradation of the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos and the socio-spatial inequalities of the Cape Flats become a testing ground for alternative political imaginaries centred on visibility, belonging, and equity.

Drawing from Stefania Consigliere's *Fables of Re-Enchantment. Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*,¹ and the xenofeminist conception of "alienation" as a catalyst for generating new worlds², the thesis advocates for a return to imagination as a critical challenge to modernity's paradigm of inevitable collapse. It explores how the infrastructures of alienation, manifested in the Cape Flats, can be repurposed as tools for imagining alternative futures. Through this speculative approach, the concept of *fiction-friction*³ is introduced as a methodological framework where speculative futures, grounded in the alienation of the territory, are combined with storytelling to catalyse change. This approach merges theoretical analysis with fictional narratives to explore how speculative imaginaries can shape material realities. Central to this methodology is the creation of an imagined manuscript for the fictional novel *Fynbos Futures*, which illustrates a re-imagined future for the Cape Flats, wherein the integration of human and more-than-human agents fosters new forms of political belonging and ecological justice. The novel's excerpts, woven throughout the thesis, serve as provocations that challenge dominant urban narratives while proposing alternative imaginaries grounded in the socio-ecological realities of Cape Town.

A central critique of the thesis is the exclusion of more-than-humans from urban discourse, advocating instead that cities are dynamic, relational ecologies where nature and culture are entwined. Thus, plant agency is foregrounded in the work. Three speculative characteristics of Fynbos worlding are developed through *Fynbos Futures*: amphibious, contaminated, and temporal. These characteristics inform the speculative territorial imaginaries for the Cape Flats: the amphibious territory, the contaminated territory, and the temporal territory, each proposing grounded yet imaginative future scenarios.

Ultimately, this thesis advocates for radical reimaginings of urbanism through speculation as an essential tool for navigating the post-natural condition of a damaged planet. It challenges the exclusionary legacies of colonialism and apartheid while embracing more just, inclusive, and hybrid urban ecologies. Through the concept of *fiction-friction*, it bridges speculative imaginaries with actionable futures, demonstrating how fictional narratives, when combined with architectural methodologies, can make alternative possibilities visible, tangible, and compelling. In doing so, the thesis positions architecture as a critical practice of world-making, one that transforms speculation into a catalyst for shaping more inclusive futures.

¹ Stefania Consigliere, *Fables of Re-Enchantment. Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*, trans. Steven Colatrella (2020; repr., New York: Minor Compositions, 2024).

² Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x01.

³ *Fiction-friction* is a term coined to hypothesise a mechanism for turning speculative images of the future into reality, as will be explained more in-depth in the introduction of this thesis.

Acknowledgement



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Tracing of a monoprint of a fynbos plant, made by author in collaboration with the fynbos

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○ Speculative Fiction: *Fynbos Futures*
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All Fynbos prints used in this thesis were made by myself in a multi-species collaborative practice using the cyanotype or monotype printing methods.

Cyanotype printing is a photographic printing process that produces cyan-blue images through a chemical reaction between iron salts and ultraviolet light. The process involves coating a surface with a light-sensitive solution of ferric ammonium citrate and potassium ferricyanide. When exposed to sunlight, the treated surface develops deep blue hues, with unexposed areas remaining white. The technique, invented by Sir John Herschel in 1842, was historically used for botanical illustrations and architectural blueprints. In this thesis the cyanotype prints were digitally manipulated to black instead of blue

Temporal

Amphibious

Contaminated

Monoprinting is a printmaking technique in which a single, unique print is made from a painted or inked plate. The artist applies ink, paint, or other mediums to a smooth surface and then presses it onto paper to create an image. Unlike other printmaking methods that allow multiple copies, a monoprint results in a one-of-a-kind work. By laying fynbos plants directly onto the inked plate, the plant forms leaf imprints when pressed. Monoprints of plants create intricate, ephemeral images that capture the texture and essence of the plants. The cover image of this thesis was made using the monotype method

Introduction

Justification and Context

This thesis does not exist in a vacuum. It has been shaped and influenced by a world in which apocalyptic images of collapse have become increasingly apparent. It is influenced by my own lived experience in this world, particularly in Cape Town, where I have witnessed the tensions between inequality, violence, and alienation. From this context, this thesis seeks to examine the intersection of urban spaces, political ecologies, and marginalised histories, while acknowledging that the very act of researching such topics comes with its own complexities and challenges. Thus, before introducing the project of this thesis, I would like to add a note on my own privilege. As a white, South African female who has spent the past two years in Italy, a first-world country, I am acutely aware of the distance this creates between myself and the inequalities I study. Even from within Cape Town, where I completed the final part of this work, I acknowledge the privilege of having lived in areas that are part of what I later call the city's "inner core," in stark contrast to the marginalised Cape Flats. I approach this research with an understanding that I can never fully understand the collective trauma inflicted on people-of-colour through colonialism and apartheid practices, but I aim to contribute thoughtfully to the ongoing dialogue on urban inequality and ecological justice. I hope that the research I present in this thesis contributes meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on urban inequality and ecological justice, offering a hopeful lens through which we might imagine alternative futures, even as these futures remain uncertain and deeply contested in the present.

Our Planetary Condition

As traditional systems collapse and binary distinctions between nature and culture erode, the current ecological and socio-political condition demands new frameworks to understand the hybrid realities of urbanity. This thesis emerges from a world deeply entangled in climate crisis, socio-political inequality, and the alienation¹ wrought by capitalism, a system rooted in the exploitative binaries of nature versus culture and human versus more-than-human. The ideological foundations of neoliberal capitalism, neo-colonialism, and patriarchy perpetuate hierarchies that prioritize profit at the expense of people and the planet, sustaining unequal power dynamics between the Global North and South, enforcing rigid gender norms, and exacerbating ecological and social injustices. Central to the critique of this thesis is the recognition that these systems position nature as "other"², influencing urban planning and conservation strategies that persistently separate nature from the city. Cartesian³ methods of dividing the natural and built environments remain deeply embedded in contemporary urban discourse, perpetuating a vision of urban nature as subordinate, fragmented, and expendable. This thesis argues that such divisions are unsustainable in the face of our current environmental and social condition, and that rethinking urbanism through a post-natural lens can open new possibilities for justice and coexistence. To confront these entrenched systems, we must critique their foundations and imagine alternative ways of living. Decolonization is pivotal to this counter-struggle, particularly in territories like the Metropolitan City of Cape Town, where colonialism eradicated commons, enslaved people to create a labour force, disrupted Indigenous ways of life, and left behind spaces marked by alienation and friction. In this context, alienation, as

¹ Alienation is a concept that will be developed throughout the thesis. As a short introduction: Alienation under capitalism as theorised by Marx refers to the estrangement of individuals from their labor, its products, other people, and their own human potential, see: See Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, trans. Martin Milligan (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1975). This process commodifies human activity and fractures the relationship between society and nature, reducing both to objects of exploitation see: Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971); John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000).

² The concept of the "other" will be investigated in detail in part 02. The "other" is a philosophical and social concept describing the process by which dominant groups construct marginalised identities as fundamentally different, inferior, or outside the bounds of normative human experience. The construction of the "other" perpetuates systems of exclusion and exploitation, relegating non-Western, non-male, or more-than-human entities to positions of subjugation. Some seminal works on the "other" include: Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949); Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

³ Cartesian dualism will be discussed in more detail in Part 02: A Framework for the Future (see pg). Descartes presents his dualism between body and mind in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), especially in the Second and Sixth Meditations. The mind is characterized as a thinking, non-extended substance (*res cogitans*), while the body is an extended, non-thinking substance (*res extensa*). *Principles of Philosophy* (1644), where Descartes condenses some of his arguments, is also a good source for his overall metaphysical system, particularly his treatment of substance and causality.

⁴ Xenofeminism is movement that emerged in the 2010s as an offshoot of cyberfeminism. It was established by the feminist collective Laboria Cuboniks, it embraces alienation as a tool for dismantling oppressive structures and rethinking relationships between humans and non-humans. For a deeper understanding see Part 02: A Framework for the Future. See also: Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism* (John Wiley & Sons, 2018) and Claudia Wiehler, "Radical Transformation through Technology: Xenofeminism as an Updated Version of Haraway's Cyborg?" (Seminar: Wissenschaft und Aktivismus, Zurich: ETH, 2020).

⁵ Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x01.

⁶ A term coined to hypothesise a mechanism for turning speculative images of the future into reality, as will be explained more in-depth in the next section of this chapter.

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Figure 0.1: Photograph of the Whorled Heath, a species of Fynbos that was naturally restricted to the city of Cape Town but is now classified as extinct in the wild

captured in the xenofeminist⁴ mantra "we are all alienated"⁵, becomes a critical lens. This condition of contemporary existence, rather than being purely negative, can be repurposed as a tool for rethinking human relationships to territories, leading to paradigmatic shifts that dismantle binaries, embrace hybridity, and foster coexistence across human and more-than-human realms.

This thesis critiques the damage inflicted by colonialism, patriarchy, and capitalism while calling for a reimagining of political belonging and relationality. Grounded in post-natural, post-colonial, and xenofeminist theories, it seeks to propose new possibilities for justice and coexistence, in



Figure 0.2: Photograph of the Fynbos plant the Raasheath

alienated cities on a damaged planet, through speculative practice and "fiction-friction".⁶ It interrogates the processes of "othering", a space created by Western thought that perpetuates inequality, and emphasises the necessity of overcoming xenophobia, as a fear of the other/alien (which includes more-than-human entities), particularly in South Africa, where its effects are deeply felt. In a world where the capitalist system is built on the separation of human and nature, and one that is increasingly influenced by right-wing politics of separation, these considerations are both urgent and globally relevant.

Cape Town as Contested Territory

The project of this thesis stems from a personal recognition of my home city, Cape Town, as a territory of both socio-political and ecological contention. Cape Town represents a complex entanglement of environmental, social, and political struggles, characterised by its status as one of the most unequal cities in the world, where the legacies of colonialism and apartheid are engrained in the spatial fabric of the city. This inequality is compounded by its location within a global biodiversity hotspot. Urbanisation, a primary driver of biodiversity loss, poses an existential threat to Cape Town's unique Fynbos biomes. Fynbos is a type of heathland vegetation type, known for its high biodiversity, that is only found in the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces of South Africa.⁷ The rate of extinction of fynbos plant species is unprecedented, making Cape Town's metropolitan area a global crisis zone for biodiversity loss.⁸ The most threatened type of Fynbos is the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos (hereafter referred to as Flats Fynbos), a critically endangered ecosystem that exists solely within the limits of Cape Town. This thesis highlights the interplay between urbanization and ecological degradation, framing the issue as fundamentally architectural. Historically, architecture and urbanism have been anthropocentric disciplines, focusing on human shelter and advancement while neglecting the more-than-human world. By addressing the degradation of urban nature and advocating for its integration into architectural and urban practices, this thesis seeks to challenge the anthropocentric focus of the field.

Situating the critically endangered Flats Fynbos at the centre of this inquiry, this thesis examines the deep entanglement of socio-political and ecological injustices shaping Cape Town's urban landscape. By foregrounding the agency of plants as active participants in shaping space, it argues for a reimagining of urban futures that are rooted in inclusivity and justice—both social and ecological. This inquiry positions architecture and urbanism not simply as tools for addressing these challenges, but

as disciplines capable of fostering more equitable relationships between human and more-than-human worlds, offering site-specific strategies to confront the crises of our time.

Fiction-Friction: speculation as mechanism for shaping alternative futures

In our current moment, where social, economic and ecological crises intersect, this thesis proposes that architects must look beyond conventional design methodologies to imagine and construct alternative futures. The project of this thesis is the creation of a speculative imaginary of the future of the contested territory of the Cape Flats fynbos. By harnessing the alienation of the site as a tool through which the territory is re-imagined, a fictional narrative will be created, from which a new reality will be explored. In this section, the need for speculative practice in architecture will be discussed and the concept of fiction-friction as a proposed mechanism for future shaping will be introduced. Speculative fiction and images of the future, particularly through the mechanism of fiction-friction, offer powerful tools for architects to challenge dominant paradigms and envision transformative possibilities. By embedding fiction-friction within their practice, architects can create spaces that resist passive reproduction of the present and actively engage with emergent futures.

The Paralysis of Imagination: A Crisis of Modernity

Engaging with Stefania Consigliere's *Fables of Re-enchantment: Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*, this thesis proposes a rethinking of our relationship to the imaginary or speculative.

John Manning, *Field Guide to Fynbos* (Cape Town: Penguin Random House South Africa, 2018).
8
A.G. Rebelo et al., "Impacts of Urbanization in a Biodiversity Hotspot: Conservation Challenges in Metropolitan Cape Town," *South African Journal of Botany* 77, no. 1 (January 2011): 20–35.
9



Figure 0.3: Typical aerial image of Cape Town, with a focus on the inner city and Table Mountain, and the Cape Flats blurred and cropped in the background

Consigliere argues that modernity's unfulfilled promises of progress and happiness have led to an erosion of shared imaginaries. This absence is marked by what she describes as a paralysis of imagination or the stifling inability to envision possibilities beyond the confines of modernity's constructs, leading to an alienation that transform the climate and socio-political crises into apocalyptic inevitabilities, where the loss of familiar worlds on a rapidly changing planet turns into the disappearance of all potential other worlds. Fatigue, disorientation, and dependency fuel this paralysis, obstructing the pathways to alternative futures.⁹ She critiques the dualistic thinking and universalism embedded in colonial modernity, which flattens complexities and erases discontinuities, variations, and transformative thresholds. This worldview imposes a measurable, quantifiable, and calculable reality, systematically silencing otherness and rendering the more-than-human world inert and objectified. The result is a homogenised

understanding of space and life, limiting the scope for imagining alternatives and reinforcing technical orthodoxy in addressing challenges like climate crises or sustainable architecture.¹⁰ Her answer to escaping this "prison" of modernity lies not in absurdly abstract or exotic alternatives but in using what persists amidst the fractures of the present as imperfect, fragmented, and unrefined as they come.¹¹

Consigliere's critique of dualistic thinking and universalism, which she identifies as hallmarks of colonial modernity, resonates deeply with architecture's historical relationship to worldviews and the imaginary. From Piranesi's speculative renderings of ruins that imagined worlds of decay and excess (see figure 0.4)¹², to Frank Lloyd Wright's organic architecture that sought harmony between human and natural worlds¹³ (see figure 0.5), to Rem Koolhaas's explorations of urban complexity and disjunction in works like S,M,L,XL¹⁴ (see figure 0.6), and to Grandeza Studio's

Stefania Consigliere, *Fables of Re-Enchantment: Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*, trans. Steven Colatrella (2020; repr. New York: Minor Compositions, 2024), 13-15.
10
Ibid. 29-36.
11
Ibid. 14-15.
12
Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *Groteschi* (Grotesques), 1748, Etching, engraving, drypoint, scratching, 1748.
13
Frank Lloyd Wright, *The Natural House* (New York: New American Library, 1932).
14
Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau, *Small, Medium, Large, Extra-Large* (New York, N.Y.: Monacelli Press, 1998).

speculative projects such as their project for the 2023 Venice Architecture Biennale: *Pilbara Interregnum: Seven Political Allegories*¹⁵ (see figure 0.7), architecture has long grappled with the tension between measurable, quantifiable constructs and the intangible realms of multiplicity and imagination. Grandeza Studio exemplifies contemporary speculative architectural practice by challenging conventional narratives of development, land use, and political ecology through allegorical interventions. Their project *Pilbara Interregnum: Seven Political Allegories* reimagines the Australian mining landscape through a speculative lens, using fiction as a critical tool to question extraction economies and territorial governance. By staging alternative scenarios that merge material histories with imagined futures, Grandeza Studio not only resists the determinism of modernity but also reactivates suppressed narratives and latent possibilities in contested territories. This thesis draws on these architectural traditions to explore how design can mediate the complexities and discontinuities Consigliere describes, positioning the built environment as an active agent in reimagining the more-than-human world. In doing so, it seeks to frame architecture not merely as a response to modernity's crises, but as a discipline capable of opening thresholds to new, inclusive futures. Against the backdrop of the alienating practice of modernity, enforced by the ideologies of capitalistic, patriarchal and neo-colonial systems, speculative imagination becomes a powerful tool to challenge and reconfigure the limitations imposed on the world through these systems. Envisioning "what-ifs" allows architecture to move beyond predictive models of habitation and into the realm of imagined possibility, a conceptual space where fragments, remnants, and excluded potentials converge to propose alternative ways of inhabiting territories. This approach embraces the tension between what exists and what could be, inviting new ways of thinking and being. To borrow the metaphor presented by the Brussels-based curatorial and research platform Perhaps it is high time for a xeno-architecture to match,

fabulations is like casting a lasso beyond the edges of imagination to catch something not yet real but possible. The act of pulling that lasso tight opens pathways to new futures that were previously invisible.¹⁶

Envisioning Futures Beyond Collapse

Today, the dystopian future has become alarmingly apparent. This thesis proposes resisting these narratives by imagining alternative possibilities that neither fall into utopian escapism nor resign to dystopian inevitability. Instead, it advocates finding ways of staying with the trouble¹⁷ and living in the precarity¹⁸ of life on a damaged planet, by recognizing that futures are contingent, messy, and relational. This needs to be done, as Consigliere proposes, through a vision of the future that calls on existing tendencies and elaborates on those tendencies to speculate on what the future could look like. Thus, this thesis will start with an extensive investigation of the Cape Flats territory, to identify the infrastructures of the present through which an alternative future can begin to be constructed.

The Potential of Images of the Future

Here, it is useful to refer to one of the foundational figures in Future Studies Fred Polak's *The Image of the Future*, in which he theorises that images of the future accompany or precede the rise and fall of cultures. Polak set out to introduce the future as a new way of understanding social change. He believed societies are driven forward by their "magnetic images of an idealized future"¹⁹, demonstrating how societies with strong images of desirable futures are more likely to achieve transformative change. Polak emphasizes that the power of these images lay in their ability to inspire collective action. Writing in the early 1970s, he wanted to warn against the nihilistic mindset of his generation, which he saw as stifling their ability to imagine positive futures. Today, we face a similar crisis of imagination, where collapse appears inevitable, and alternative futures seem unattainable. I would like to argue that architects are uniquely positioned

15 Grandeza Studio, "Pilbara Interregnum: Seven Political Allegories," 2023, <https://www.grandeza.studio/projects/pilbara-interregnum>.
 16 Perhaps it is high time for a xeno-architecture to match, *Xeno-Architecture: Radical Spatial Practice and the Politics of Alienation*, interview by Alison Hugill, *Architect*, February 17, 2017.
 17 In her book, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Donna Haraway advocates for remaining engaged with the complex and messy realities of the world rather than seeking to escape them through utopian thinking or apocalyptic despair. She calls for a recognition of multispecies entanglements and an ethics of "making kin," emphasizing collaboration and responsibility across human and nonhuman actors. "Staying with the trouble" is a call to face the challenges of the Anthropocene by fostering ongoing care, coexistence, and creative survival in a damaged world. See: Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC): London: Duke University Press, 2016).
 18 Anthropologist Anna Tsing explores the concept of "precarity" as a condition of uncertainty, instability, and vulnerability that shapes life in the aftermath of capitalist destruction. For Tsing, "living in precarity" involves finding ways to adapt and thrive within damaged landscapes and systems by forming unexpected collaborations and recognizing interdependencies. See: Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).
 19 Fred Polak, *The Image of the Future* (Amsterdam; New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1973), 1.
 20 Dan Lockton and Stuart Candy, "A Vocabulary for Visions in Designing for Transitions," *DRS2018: Catalyst 1* (June 2018).
 21 *Ibid.*
 22 Cory Doctorow, "A Vocabulary for Speaking about the Future," *Locust*, January 2012.
 23 Robert K. Merton, "The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy," *The Antioch Review* 8, no. 2 (1948): 193–210.



Figure 0.4: Giovanni Battista Piranesi, from the series: *Grotteschi (Grotesques)*, etching, engraving, drypoint, scratching, 1748.



Figure 0.5: Frank Lloyd Wright, *Fallingwater Perspective Drawing*, 1935, From The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation Archives

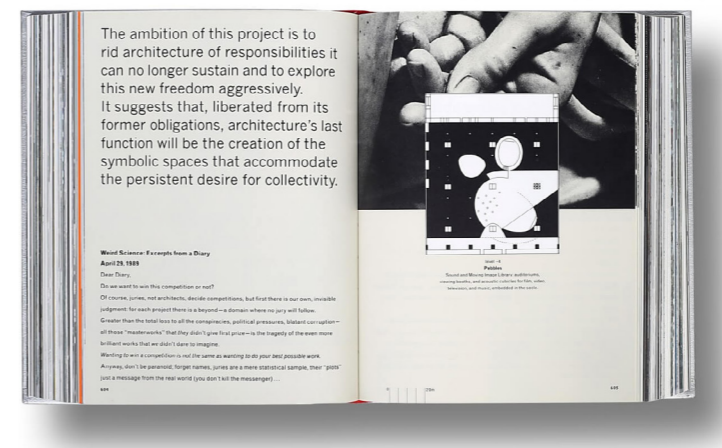


Figure 0.6: Pages 504-505, of *S,M,L,XL* by Rem Koolhaas and Bruce Mau

to envision alternative futures through our spatial and material thinking. Architecture inherently operates in the future, designing spaces, structures, and environments that do not yet exist but will shape lived experiences. Architects possess the tools to visualize complex scenarios through drawings, models, and speculative projects that can bridge the gap between abstract ideas and tangible realities. This ability to make the future visible, comprehensible, and spatially grounded is essential to shaping more sustainable and just worlds. By imagining alternative futures, architects not only participate in envisioning what is possible but also bring those possibilities closer to material realization. The critical question is: how can architects turn these future images into actionable realities? This thesis proposes that fictional narratives can serve as the mechanism to accompany speculative images, making them compelling enough to inspire action.

Beliefs in Future-making

In their paper, "A Vocabulary for Visions in Designing for Transitions", Dan Lockton and Stuart Candy propose an interesting interpretation of Polak's notion that a culture's image of the future may represent a type of self-fulfillingness, which they call "circularity"²⁰. At its simplest, this interpretation poses that images of desirable futures may compel people to work towards that future, to "fulfil the prophecy"²¹. In line with this, writer Cory Doctorow stated that he believed that in almost every circumstance where science fiction correctly "predicted" the future, it would be more accurate to say that it inspired that future²². The more complex version of "circularity" proposed by Lockton and Candy draws closer to Robert Merton's theories on self-fulfilling prophecies, in which he proposes that if something is defined as real, it becomes real in its consequence²³. The most classic example of this articulation being that of a bank run, wherein clients of the bank believe rumours of insolvency, leading them to withdraw their savings from the bank, through which they ultimately bring about the insolvency, even if the rumours were false to begin with. According to Lockton and Candy,

this phenomenon is central to both design practice and futures work, as both depend on present “imaginaries” and envisioned futures. They explain that if people believe something to be real, act accordingly, and shape institutions and systems around that belief, it can eventually become real.²⁴ Another example, one in the realm of fiction, is the use of the term “cyberspace”²⁵, that emerged from William Gibson’s science-fiction novel, *Neuromancer*, in 1984, as the primary concept through which the emerging technologies of the internet were understood in the 1990s. Through Gibson’s work, what had been up until then an inconspicuous technology, used mainly for communication between specialists in the form of numerical data, took on a spatial dimension, evoking worlds to come. The intense “hype” surrounding Gibson’s cyberspace, unintentionally shaped the future, our present. The crucial point is that beliefs, when strong enough to inspire action, have the potential to turn imagined futures into reality, a central point upon which this thesis builds. However, many contemporary anticipatory beliefs are driven by panic, fear of societal collapse, devastating inequality, or climate disaster. If Polak warned of his generation’s nihilistic turn, today we face an even graver crisis: a collective inability to imagine futures beyond collapse.

Confidence as Transformative Force

We may find an answer to the question of shaping future imaginaries in the writings of the late Mark Fisher (also known under his blogging alias k-punk). Fisher was committed to imagining a “positive” way to influence the future, driven not by panic or paranoia, but by confidence, in a Spinozian²⁶ sense. Fisher proposed beliefs of the future fuelled by confidence, a forward-looking, empowering force that activates agency and instills hope. Rather than succumbing to narratives of crisis and panic, he suggested that we reframe alienation itself as an opportunity for transformation, infused with confidence instead of despair. Fisher’s notion of confidence as a transformative force echoes Fred Polak’s idea of “influence-optimism”, the belief that future-oriented images can shape

reality by instilling hope and motivating action. For both thinkers, positive futures are not passive fantasies but active interventions. In order to rewrite the future, we must cultivate images of the future that are concrete and plausible enough to generate confidence. As Fisher puts it: “the more we believe it, the more we can make it happen; the more we make it happen, the more we believe it...” This spiral of belief and action suggests that future-making is a self-fulfilling prophecy. By imagining new worlds and confidently acting toward their realization, we create the conditions in which these worlds can emerge. In this way, creating future imaginaries becomes a method for actively shaping better futures rather than passively accepting dystopian inevitabilities. This reflects a slow socio-cultural shift, retooling philosophy and political theory for the twenty-first century and enabling new conceptual ways to navigate a damaged planet. In asking whether speculative approaches can transcend the human mind and embrace the xeno, the alien, the unknown, it opens the possibility of imagining new and just worlds. This concept provides a framework for navigating a damaged planet by fostering socio-cultural shifts that challenge entrenched structures and open pathways to more just and equitable futures.

Fiction-Friction

This thesis proposes the concept of fiction-friction as a mechanism for shaping alternative futures. Fiction-friction, as developed here, arises from the tension between imagined possibilities and material realities. It functions as a method for navigating the complexities of contested territories and exploring the transformative potential of speculative thinking in architecture and urbanism. To understand this concept, it is first necessary to situate contestation within spatial theory. Returning to Consigliere’s critique, the modern world’s disenchantment device, an operational mechanism that abstracts space from its political and social entanglements, renders landscapes inert and apolitical. This process conceals the inherent conflicts and frictions that shape space. Yet, far from being neutral, landscapes, territories, and spaces

²⁴ Dan Lockton and Stuart Candy, “A Vocabulary for Visions in Designing for Transitions,” *DRS2018. Catalyst 1* (June 2018).

²⁵ William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984).

²⁶ When something is described as being in a Spinozian sense, it refers to the philosophical ideas of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), especially his views on affect, agency, and the interconnected nature of reality. In the context of Mark Fisher’s use of confidence as a “positive” hyperstition, the term suggests a view of affects (emotions or states of being) as forces that increase or decrease our capacity to act in the world. By invoking a Spinozian sense, Fisher suggests that confidence is a generative force. It’s not just a belief or emotion, it’s a world-shaping power that increases one’s ability to shape reality and achieve better futures. For further reading see: Baruch Spinoza, *The Essential Spinoza* (Hackett Publishing, 2006), Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, trans. Robert Hurley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988) and Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly: The Power of Spinoza’s Metaphysics and Politics* (Minneapolis, Oxford: University Of Minnesota Press, 1991).



Figure 0.7: Grandeza Studio's project for the Venice Biennale 2023: *Pilbara Interregnum: Seven Political Allegories*

are fundamentally conflictual and contested.²⁷ They are sites of ongoing negotiation, shaped by precarious forms of life that emerge from political and spatial frictions.²⁸ These spaces are layered with power relations, histories, and more-than-human entanglements. They are shaped by social and ecological interactions, where long-standing systems of dispossession, extractivism, and exclusion continue to manifest and collide. Clara Oloriz Sanjuan describes landscape as both a territorial project and a political aesthetic technology, constantly produced, reshaped, and contested by competing ideological visions.²⁹ This thesis adopts this perspective to argue that friction, which arises from these conflicts, can be harnessed through speculative design to envision alternative futures grounded in the realities of contested spaces. Friction here is a productive force

that reveals the cracks in dominant systems and exposes the possibilities for alternative futures. Friction, in this sense, serves as both resistance and a generative force. It illuminates the constraints of mutable social, environmental, and economic systems while enabling creative responses to those constraints. The specific friction with which this thesis deals is alienation, the sense of disconnection that manifests in socio-political and ecological contexts. Alienation, in this regard, becomes both a condition to be addressed and a catalyst for speculative thought.

In architecture and urbanism, friction also becomes a method of engagement. Rather than smoothing over tensions, it brings obstacles to the forefront, encouraging exchanges that spark transformative ideas.

²⁷ Stefania Consigliere, *Fables of Re-Enchantment. Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*, trans. Steven Colatrella (2020, repr. New York: Minor Compositions, 2024), 13-15.

²⁸ Camillo Boano and Richard Lee Peragine, “A Pedagogy of Uselessness: Challenging Solutionism and Utility in the Anthropocene through Architectural Pedagogy,” *The Journal of Architecture*, August 7, 2024, 14.

²⁹ Clara Oloriz Sanjuan, ed., *Landscape as Territory* (Barcelona: Actar Publishers & Architectural Association, 2019).

This thesis proposes that speculative fiction can act as a powerful frictional force. To provide an example how speculative fiction can trigger real-world responses, I would like to present GRANDEZA Studio's 2019 project for the XXII Triennale di Milano, *Teatro Della Terra Alienata: Reimagining the Fate of the Great Barrier Reef*³⁰ (see figures 0.8-0.10). This film-based project explored the ecological and political crises surrounding the Great Barrier Reef through a speculative narrative. The degradation of the reef, a planetary symbol of biodiversity, was juxtaposed with the socio-political mismanagement of the region by the Australian government. In the fiction, the reef is seceded from Australia's sovereignty and handed over to a fictional geopolitical entity, the *Archipelago of Territories Alienated from Capitalism* (ATAC). This imaginative act of secession symbolized a radical break from exploitative systems, envisioning an alternative governance structure for the reef's preservation. According to GRANDEZA Studio, their speculative narrative garnered significantly more public attention and critical dialogue than the factual reports and analysis on the mismanagement of the reef. The fiction-friction they created disrupted dominant narratives and mobilized public engagement in ways that purely factual accounts had failed to achieve. In a conversation with Aude Christel Mgba and Bruno Alves de Almeida on the topic of "Fiction as Friction," the project's authors emphasized that from this project, they learned that speculative fiction can be a more effective catalyst for critical conversations than presenting facts alone.³¹ Fiction, when deployed strategically, generates friction by exposing overlooked contradictions and envisioning grounded alternatives. It disrupts normative structures while providing a pathway for new dialogues and actions. Friction, in this context, becomes a transformative force. It disrupts entrenched norms and reveals spaces of possibility, where speculative practices envision grounded, plausible alternatives. These alternatives are not abstract utopias but situated responses rooted in local realities and adaptive to existing challenges. They embrace precarity and coexistence, advocating for forms of life that resist extractive systems and engage in

mutual transformation.

Thus, the hypothesis is that by combining the material realities of contested territories with the fictional narratives that challenge current systems, enough "hype" can be created around images of the future, to effectively lead to them becoming reality. Or at least that is the hypothesis of this thesis. Speculation becomes a tool not only for critique but for proposing actionable futures. Thus, combining friction and fiction to form fiction-friction can be a powerful tool through which imagined futures could become realities.

This thesis seeks to follow the path set by *Teatro Della Terra Alienata* by investigating how forces of fiction-friction could be instrumentalized to expand urgent discussions beyond mere abstractions and into mechanisms that shape material realities. The Cape Flats, a contested space of extreme socio-political and ecological alienation, serves as the site of this investigation. The Cape Flats embodies layers of exclusion, precarity, and fragmentation, yet it also holds unrealized potentials for alternative futures. By grounding speculative imaginaries in the fragments and remnants of the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, this thesis seeks to instil confidence in the possibility of a different future for the region, one where human and more-than-human worlds are entangled in new, politically charged forms of coexistence. From the outset, incorporating the more-than-human world into speculative practice challenges entrenched anthropocentric ideologies. The inclusion of Fynbos plants as agents of change within speculative

futures introduces the fiction-friction necessary to catalyze transformation.

The Need for Speculative Practice

Speculative thinking in design involves projecting future scenarios not simply as predictions but as active forces that shape the present. This approach rejects linear, deterministic models of progress in favour of embracing uncertainty and contingency. By imagining alternative realities, speculative

³⁰ To view the project see: <https://www.grandeza.studio/projects/australian-pavilion-xxii-triennale-di-milano-2019-broken-nature>
³¹ GRANDEZA STUDIO, Aude Christel Mgba, and Bruno Alves de Almeida, "Fiction as Friction, a Conversation on Crafting Resistance and Solidarity between GRANDEZA STUDIO (Amaia Sánchez-Velasco, Jorge Valiente Oriol, and Gonzalo Valiente Oriol), Aude Christel Mgba, and Bruno Alves de Almeida," ed. Anna Tonkin and Alexandra Pereira-Edwards, *Forces of Friction* (Canadian Centre for Architecture, December 2024), Canadian Center for Architecture.

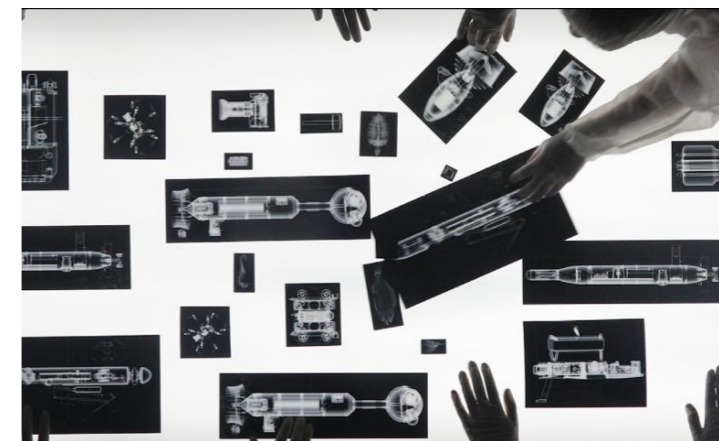
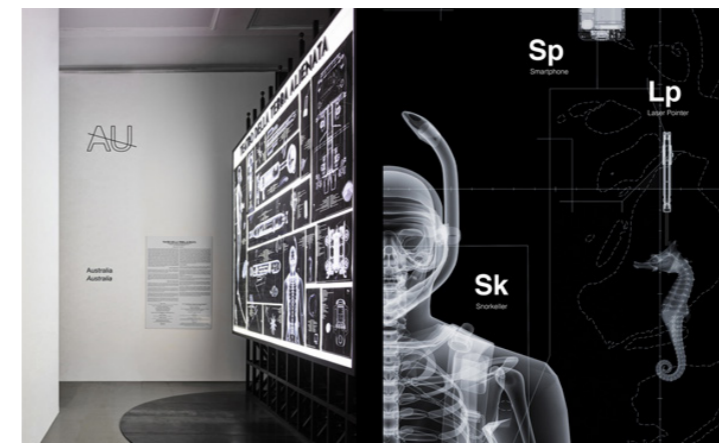


Figure 0.8-0.10: *Teatro Della Terra Alienata: Reimagining the Fate of the Great Barrier Reef*, by Grandeza Studio

design acts as a tool to question existing social, political, and environmental conditions, fostering transformative possibilities. It allows designers to navigate complex, evolving conditions and engage with emerging futures in ways that are both critical and creative.

The concept of fiction-friction, as developed in this thesis, operates at the intersection of speculative fiction and material reality. It advocates for an architectural practice that moves beyond conventional problem-solving methods to embrace imaginative, situated possibilities. Fiction-friction acknowledges that alternative futures are not idealised endpoints, but dynamic processes shaped through continuous negotiation and adaptation, and operates through open-ended narratives that evolve over time, adapting to new contexts and challenges. This flexibility makes fiction-friction particularly relevant in addressing complex, multi-scalar issues such as climate change and urbanization. It recognizes that speculative fictions, when embedded in contested territories, generate enough friction to disrupt entrenched systems and inspire real-world change. To allow this to happen images of the future need to be collectivised and opened up to participation and collaboration and they need to be practically deployed through narratives and images of the future.

In weaving together and ecological thinking, xenofeminist critiques, fictional narratives, and speculative images of the future, this research advocates for an architectural practice that imagines alternative futures through the entanglements of plants, people, and politics. The aim is not to propose utopian visions but to explore actionable, situated possibilities for living and organizing in an era of profound ecological and social challenges. Fiction-friction, as both concept and method, becomes a vital tool for envisioning and enacting new worlds.

Fiction-Friction: On Speculation as a Mechanism for Shaping Alternative Futures

This thesis proposes that in an era where social, ecological and political crises intersect, architecture can respond by extending conventional design methodologies to explore speculative modes of enquiry. Thus, this thesis adopts fiction-friction as a methodological tool, using speculative narratives not as abstract exercises but

as situated practice that engage with material realities. Building on the work of Wilkie, Savransky and Rosengarten in *Speculative Research, The Lure of Possible Futures*³², speculation is positioned as an active practice, one that does not only imagine possible futures, but constructs speculative interventions that shape how futures are conceived and navigated.³³

Speculation, in this framework, operates within specific conditions rather than outside of them. As theorized in *Speculative Research: The Lure of Possible Futures*, speculation is never detached from empirical realities but is instead situated within historically, politically, and ecologically contingent landscapes³⁴. Unlike other future-oriented ways of thinking, speculative practices do not attempt to create an idealised, abstract future. Instead, they engage with specific conditions of the present as a starting point for experimenting with alternative possibilities. As Alfred Whitehead put it, speculative propositions are "tales that perhaps might be told about particular actualities"³⁵. Thus, proposing that what we speculate must be grounded in real, existing conditions. Aligned to this framework of situated speculation, this thesis proposes the Cape Flats and its Fynbos biome not merely as subjects of enquiry, but active participants in the speculative process. Fiction-friction, then, is the frictional encounter between speculative imaginaries and grounded territorial conditions, a method that simultaneously embraces and unsettles dominant urban paradigms.

Following from insights from *The Trouble with Speculation*, speculation is understood not as an escape from reality but as a way to challenge determinism and inevitability.³⁶ Rather than passively accepting ecological collapse or the persistence of colonial urban frameworks, fiction-friction works as a tool for unsettling established narratives and generating alternative worldviews. Nik Baerten writes a debate between "two professional speculators" in "the Debate", the penultimate essay in *The Trouble with Speculation*, wherein the one character postulates that speculation should not be

seen as merely constructing imaginary worlds but rather as an active engagement with the conditions that shape reality:

“I think we are setting the stage, not by creating an aesthetic backdrop but an agonistic context which enables all involved to confront views, to engage in collaborative world building. And it is not just about them and that instantiated future. It is about them and everybody and everything else that makes that future or will be affected by it, every relationship that reshapes and will be reshaped.”³⁸

Following from this, the speculative fictions embedded in this thesis, therefore, are not predictions but provocations, acts of world-building that refuse to naturalise current injustices. Functioning instead, as interventions that unsettle dominant paradigms and open up alternative pathways for the urban and ecological future of the Cape Flats.

32 Alex Wilkie, Martin Savransky, and Marsha Rosengarten, *Speculative Research: The Lure of Possible Futures* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2017).
33 *Ibid.*, 11.
34 *Ibid.*, p.7.
35 Alfred Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Free Press, 1978).
36 Christine Mortimer and Maria Alejandra Luján Escalante, *The Trouble with Speculation, Natures, Futures, Politics* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2024).
37 Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (Verso Books, 2013).
38 Nik Baerten, "The Debate," in *The Trouble with Speculation, Natures, Futures, Politics*, ed. Christine a Mortimer and Maria Alejandr (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2024), 250–55.

39 Alex Wilkie, Martin Savransky, and Marsha Rosengarten, *Speculative Research: The Lure of Possible Futures* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2017).
40 Christine Mortimer and Maria Alejandra Luján Escalante, *The Trouble with Speculation, Natures, Futures, Politics* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2024).
41 Rosalyn Diprose, "Speculative Research, Temporality and Politics," in *Speculative Research the Lure of Possible Futures*, ed. Alex Wilkie, Martin Savransky, and Marsha Rosengarten (New York: Routledge, 2017), 39–51.
42 Rebecca Coleman, "Developing Speculative Methods to Explore Speculative Shipping: Mail Art, Futurity and Empiricism," in *Speculative Research the Lure of Possible Futures*, ed. Alex Wilkie, Martin Savransky, and Marsha Rosengarten (New York: Routledge, 2017), 130–44.
43 *The Uncertain Commons, Speculate This!* (2013; Durham and London: Duke University Press., nd), 13.
44 *Ibid.*, 72.
45 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC): London: Duke University Press, 2016).
46 A Wilkie, M Michael, and M Plummer-Fernandez, "Speculative Method and Twitter: Bots, Energy and Three Conceptual Characters," *The Sociological Review*, August 14, 2014, 1–23.

Methodology

Speculation as Situated Research

This thesis employs a methodology that is rooted in speculative research, as proposed in *Speculative Research, The Lure of Possible Futures*³⁹ and *The Trouble With Speculation*,⁴⁰ *Natures, Futures, Politics*, where imagination is not separate from empirical enquiry, rather co-constituting alternative futures. In "Speculative Research, Temporality and Politics", Rosalyn Diprose argues that speculation must be distinguished from simple fantasy. She writes that speculation is not an abstract escape but a situated practice that engages with real constraints, histories, and materialities⁴¹. Therefore, the speculative futures proposed in this work are grounded in the socio-ecological conditions of the Cape Flats and its Fynbos biome, drawing from archival research and urban analysis. This approach emphasises the entanglement of creative speculation with grounded, material realities, enabling the exploration of new possibilities that challenge existing paradigms and open up avenues for transformative change. By integrating imaginative processes with critical inquiry, the methodology allows for the generation of speculative interventions that engage with the complexities of ecological, political, and social landscapes, offering alternative visions for a more just future.

Affirmative Speculation

The concept of affirmative speculation, as explored in *Speculative Research* by Rebecca Coleman, further informs this thesis' methodological approach.⁴² The anonymous collection of academics and activists called the Uncertain Commons describe affirmative speculation as a mode of speculation that aims "to hold on to the spectrum of possibilities while remaining open to multiple futures whose context of actualisation can never be fully anticipated"⁴³

“(Affirmative speculation) functions and thrives by concerning itself with an uncertainty that must not be reduced to manageable certainties. By definition, affirmative speculation lives by thinking in the vicinity of the unthinkable (rather than by asserting that the unthinkable is in principle always thinkable, knowable, calculable, and so on).”⁴⁴

Rather than merely critiquing the present or predicting dystopian inevitabilities, affirmative speculation seeks to generate new modes of thinking and acting. It aligns with what Donna Haraway's concept of "staying with the trouble", where she refuses to see the future as either fully determined or entirely open, but rather as a contested space where interventions and relations matter⁴⁵. Writing on speculative methodologie Wilkie et al. state that:

“Speculative methodology, of course, is not descriptive: it is performative. Its interventions are designed to “prompt” [. . .] emergent enactments that can problematise existing practices [. . .] and open up the prospective.”⁴⁶

Thus, in this thesis, the speculative imaginaries that are constructed, function as active propositions rather than passive conjectures

Fiction Friction as catalyst for alternative futures

At the core of the speculative methodology of this thesis is the concept of *fiction-friction*. *Fiction-friction* is a mechanism that emerges from the tension between imagined possibilities and material realities that creates a productive space for shaping alternative futures. *Fiction-Friction* in this thesis functions in a similar way to Boden and Ross' speculation on the role of glitches, as explored in *Speculating with Glitches: Keeping the Future Moving*. They write: "A glitch involves the revelation of an infrastructural failure and the potential for new organizations of life"⁴⁸. Similarly, *Fiction-friction* operates as a glitch in dominant urban discourse, exposing the colonial residue of Cape Town's spatial planning and simultaneously offering speculative alternatives for post-natural urban imaginaries.

By integrating speculative research within an architectural discourse, this work aligns itself with a growing field of speculative design and critical urban theory. It underscores the potential of fiction not as an act of escapism but as an active force in world-making. Through the friction of speculation against historical realities, this thesis seeks to reclaim imagination as a necessary, political, and methodological tool for reconfiguring post-natural urban futures.

Research and Mapping

The investigation into the socio-political and ecological conditions of the Cape Flats is grounded in situated research. This includes a synthesis of academic papers, government documents, aerial imagery, and GIS data to critically analyse the conditions of exclusion and inequality in the territory. This empirical research is essential for understanding the historical and present-day realities that shape the Cape Flats and its endangered fynbos biome.

Theoretical Framework: Beyond Binary Thinking

Building on this research, the thesis develops a theoretical framework that challenges binary and exclusionary categories. Drawing from Bruno Latour, Philippe Descola, and Donna Haraway,⁴⁹ the framework presents the post-natural condition as a lens to view the Cape Flats as a hybrid, entangled territory. This perspective disrupts nature/culture and human/non-human divides, and promotes relational and plural alternatives.

The thesis then speculates on actionable principles by combining xenofeminism with the relational African philosophy of ubuntu. This synthesis culminates in the creation of "An Afroxenofeminist Manifesto for Cape Town" (Appendix A), that proposes alternative imaginaries that embrace justice, hybridity, and coexistence. Appendix A draws reference from Laboria Cuboniks' *Xenofeminist Manifesto*.⁵⁰

Alienation as Generator for Future Imaginaries

The xenofeminist conception of alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds is adopted in the thesis.⁵¹ It allows for the friction in *fiction-friction*. Firstly, it is used as a lens through which to analyse the territory and from which to identify existing tendencies and infrastructures of alienation from which a situated vision of the future can be imagined. Secondly, it acts as a generator for new worlds by repurposing this alienation, through an embrace of the alien, the strange, the other. In the case of this thesis, a method for achieving this is by centring the historically othered more-than-human as a protagonist in the fictional narrative of Fynbos Futures.

Centring the Fynbos

The Fynbos plants, in the context of this thesis, become the emblems of the alien/strange/other, that need to be included in visions of the future. Through speculating with and through these plants, on their acts of worlding and incorporating these acts into the

47
Shawn Boden and Jen Ross, "Speculating with Glitches: Keeping the Future Moving," in *The Trouble with Speculation, Natures, Futures, Politics*, ed. Christine Mortimer and Maria Alejandra Luján Escalante (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2024), 13–35.
48
Ibid, 15.
49
See for example: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); and Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (N.C.): Duke University Press, 2016).
50
Laboria Cuboniks, The Xenofeminist Manifesto (Verso Books, 2018).
51



Figure 0.11: The Monprint made in collaboration with Fynbos actors and used as the Cover of this thesis

methodology for reimagining the Cape Flats, emphasis is put on coexistence and multi-species flourishing for an alternative future.

Multi-Species Collaboration through Printmaking

As part of this thesis's methodological approach, the process of creating monprints and cyanotype prints with fynbos is conceptualised as a form of multi-species collaboration. These prints, rather than merely

Ibid, 0x01.
52
Alex Wilkie, Martin Savransky, and Marsha Rosengarten, *Speculative Research: The Lure of Possible Futures* (Florence: Taylor and Francis,

serving as representations of the fynbos emerge through the physical presence and interaction of the plants with the art medium. Without the material agency of the fynbos, its textures, forms, and shadows, the prints would not exist. This process foregrounds the role of more-than-humans as active participants in meaning-making and speculative world-building, reinforcing the thesis's broader argument for decentring human agency in urban and ecological imaginaries.

The use of monprints (see figure 0.11) and cyanotypes (see figure 0.12-0.13) aligns with the thesis's speculative methodology, by engaging with materiality in a way that is both empirical and imaginative.⁵² These prints do not simply depict the fynbos but record its direct imprint, capturing traces of its presence in a manner that transcends visual representation. The cyanotype process is activated through exposure to sunlight, further embedding the plants within a dynamic system of transformation, where time, light, and botanical matter collaborate in the creation of new forms. By working with the fynbos through printmaking, the act of research becomes a practice of attunement, observing, selecting, and arranging plant material in a way that respects their agency. This process fosters an engaged, situated practice that does not attempt to control or dominate the subject but rather coexists with it in an open-ended, speculative manner. Just as speculative fiction blurs the boundary between reality and possibility, these prints exist at the intersection of documentation and transformation. They serve as physical artifacts of multi-species entanglement, embodying the thesis's argument for a post-natural urbanism that acknowledges the agency of non-human actors.

Furthermore, the prints resonate with the amphibious, contaminated, and temporal qualities explored in this thesis's speculative design scenarios. The process of making them is amphibious, dependent on both human intention and the unpredictable influence of plant material and environmental conditions. It is contaminated, in that it embraces the mingling of organic and synthetic elements,

acknowledging hybridity as a fundamental characteristic of the post-natural condition. It is temporal, as each print records a fleeting moment of botanical presence, inscribing the fynbos within a temporal archive of ecological and political significance.

Through this printmaking process, the fynbos is repositioned from passive subject to active collaborator. This methodology resists authoritarian modes of representation and instead embraces a relational practice that recognizes the interdependencies between human and more-than-human agencies. In doing so, the prints contribute to the thesis's overarching framework of multi-species world-making, reinforcing the argument that the future of the Cape Flats must be imagined not just for, but with, the fynbos.

Fiction as a Design Tool

The speculative narrative, *Fynbos Futures*, is an original fictional manuscript embedded within the thesis. It serves as both a critique and proposal, illustrating a reimagined future for the Cape Flats through the integration of human and more-than-human agents. It critiques dominant urban development practices while proposing alternative pathways grounded in hybridity and ecological justice.

The narrative challenges the factual/fictional and academic/creative binaries by blending storytelling with theory. This methodological choice reflects the thesis's broader mechanism of Fiction-Friction, using fiction to provoke imagination and catalyse change. By weaving excerpts from the novel into the thesis, the boundary between theory and narrative is blurred, creating a hybrid form of theory-fiction.

The fictional Novel is made of a collection of short stories that take place in the Future of the Cape Flats, as well as Appendixes, that explain the conditions with which this alternative future was shaped. In this thesis, "Story 6: We are the Seeds" is presented as an example of the fictional narratives of the novel. Three of the novel's appendixes are

also presented as central to this thesis as they propose the speculations which lead to the re-imagining of the flats. It is important to note that these sections are not appendixes to the thesis, but to the fictional novel: *Fynbos Futures*. In the thesis the Fictional narrative is precluded by the cover page of the manuscript, to inform the reader of the shift to the fictional (see figure 0.14).

The process of writing speculative fiction draws inspiration from Ursula K. Le Guin and Donna Haraway. In particular, Le Guin's "The Author of the Acacia Seeds"⁵² and "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"⁵³, along with Haraway's "Camille Stories"⁵⁴, serve as significant influences. These works demonstrate how fiction can be a political act of world-making, inspiring this thesis's narrative experiments.

Speculative Design

The thesis proposes three speculative future scenarios based on characteristics of fynbos worlding: amphibious, contaminated, and temporal. These scenarios are not fixed categories but mutable territories, continuously shifting between amphibious-contaminated-temporal states. This approach moves beyond binary categorization toward plural and complex alternatives, reflecting the dynamic and entangled nature of the Cape Flats.

The speculative design process imagines these three future territories as interventions that respond to both ecological degradation and urban inequality. Rather than proposing rigid solutions, the thesis presents amphibious-contaminated-temporal futures as ongoing, adaptive processes that evolve with the conditions of the territory.

Fiction-Friction as a Methodological Tool

Ultimately, the creation of fiction becomes a design tool for generating speculative futures. The *Fiction-Friction* mechanism integrates storytelling with spatial thinking, bridging abstract ideas and material realities. This thesis demonstrates that speculative

2017).
53
Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Author of the Acacia Seeds," in *The Unreal and the Real* (Simon & Schuster, 2016).
Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" (1973; repr., Mankato, Minn.: Creative Education, 1993).
54
Donna Haraway, "The Camille Stories, Children of Compost," in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (London: Duke



Figure 0.12: Cyanotype made in collaboration with the Fynbos plants

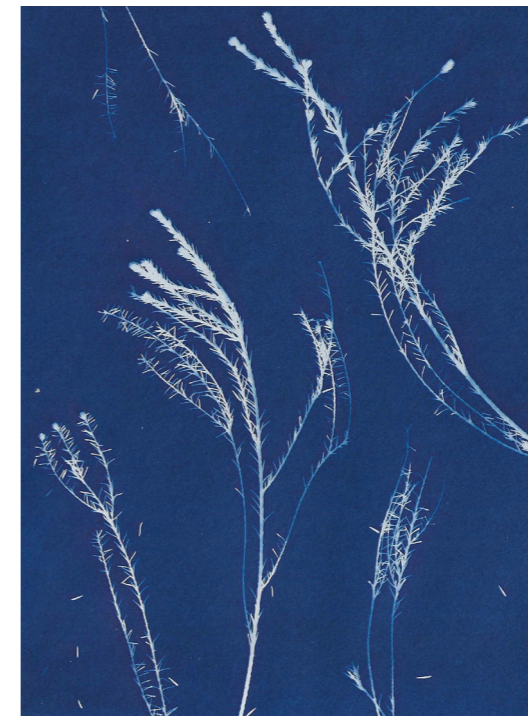


Figure 0.13: Cyanotype made in collaboration with the Fynbos plants

University Press, 2016), 134–68.
55
Mindy Seu, "Cyberfeminism Index," *cyberfeminismindex.com* (Rhizome, 2020), <https://cyberfeminismindex.com/>.
56
See: Laboria Cuboniks, n.d., <https://>

narratives, when combined with architectural methodologies, can shape actionable futures by making alternative possibilities visible, tangible, and compelling. In doing so, it positions architecture as a critical practice of world-making that embraces imagination and speculation to navigate the post-natural condition of a damaged planet.

Structure

Part 01: A Contested Territory: Frictions on the Cape Flats

The first Part of the thesis focuses on introducing the reader to the territory as a contested space with overlapping layers of complexity, where power-relations, histories and more-than-human entanglements shape the territory. Ecologic and socio-political frictions are identified by investigating the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos Biome and the Cape Flats in tandem, to reveal the mechanisms of exclusion and inequality that have been deployed on the territory. Through this investigation, the existing tendencies and trajectories of the site are revealed, to serve as a foundation for speculative alternatives presented in later chapters. By mapping these existing frictions, the groundwork is laid for exploring alternative futures that respond to the unique challenges of the site.

Part 02: A Framework for the Future

The Second Chapter aims to provide the reader with the conceptual tools, with which to navigate the text of this thesis, and the current condition of our world. The chapter is titled: "A Framework for the Future". Future here refers directly to the future of this thesis, i.e. the chapters to come, and especially the fictional narratives and images of the future that will be presented in the two last parts. However, it also refers to the future of the world, in hopes that the concepts, and theories discussed here will be considered when entering and imagining futures to come. A theoretical framework, is given in conjunction with a conceptual

glossary that draws reference from online repositories such as the Cyberfeminist Index⁵⁵ and the collective Laboria Cuboniks' website⁵⁶, containing a selection of concepts, theories and provocations for the reader to refer back to later, guided by annotations and cross-references. This chapter outlines a vocabulary for rethinking human and more-than-human relationships within a post-colonial, post-natural space, and guided by the theories of xeno-feminism and the African philosophy of ubuntu. It ends by presenting the first Appendix of the imagined fictional novel, *Fynbos Futures*⁵⁷, that contains the "AfroXenofeminist Manifesto for the future of the City of Cape Town".

Part 03: Infrastructures of Alienation in the Neo-Colonial Territory

Following the discussion of xenofeminist and ubuntu concepts in the previous chapter, the third chapter identifies alienation, the amalgamation of the exclusions and inequalities felt on site, as a condition to be addressed as well as a catalyst for speculative thought, wherethrough the ubuntu concept of relationality can be realised. Through this lens, the territory is re-examined and the infrastructures of alienation (bordering, surveillance, naturalism, knowledge distribution, conservation) are identified, and discussed. Spaces in which alienation becomes a form of resistance to colonial legacies are also explored as alternatives through which we can begin to imagine another future for the site, where alienation becomes a tool to create a relational future.

Part 04: Plants as Protagonists

In the fourth chapter, the Fynbos plants are presented as protagonists within the territory with whom the infrastructures of alienation can be re-thought. Here, Emanuele Coccia's book: *The Life of Plants, A Metaphysics of Mixture*,⁵⁸ is presented as speculative text that engages with the lives of plants. Similarly, this thesis, through an investigation into qualities of vegetal lives, speculates on three characteristics of the worlding of Fynbos plants, namely amphibiousness,

contamination and temporality.

By investigating three characteristics of Fynbos life, amphibiousness, contamination, and temporality, the thesis speculates on how plants can actively shape space and influence human relationships with the land. The chapter bridges the theoretical and the speculative, by presenting these characteristics as an appendix on the lives of Fynbos belonging the fictional novel: *Fynbos Futures*, the fictional novel, imagined as a methodological tool for the project of this thesis.

This chapter means to set the reader up for the fictional narratives to come, wherein the existing tendencies of the site, the infrastructures of alienation and the principles of fynbos life are combined to speculate on an alternative future for the Cape Flats. By including the Fynbos plants and the more-than-human world into the methodology of imagining speculative futures, exclusionary, alienating and anthropocentric ideologies are challenged. Furthermore, the inclusion of Fynbos plants as agents of change within speculative futures introduces the fiction-friction necessary to catalyse transformation

Part 05: The Manuscript: A Fictional Narrative for the Future

In the fifth chapter the text takes on a fictional tone and the unequal condition of the Cape Flats becomes a testing ground for alternative political imaginaries around an infrastructure of visibility, belonging and equity, architected in collaboration with the Fynbos plants and through the harnessing of existing and new technologies of liberation.

Here, the reader is presented with a chapter, "Seeds in the Fire", and an appendix from a (imagined) unpublished fiction novel: *Fynbos Futures*, written by an unknown author⁵⁹, that gained traction and almost cult-like status among Capetonians after being discovered in mid-2024. The excerpt from the novel manuscript, along with notes added to explain the symbolism and meaning behind the text as well as changes according to the oral

laboriacuboniks.net/

57

A fictional fiction novel, chapters of which were written specifically for this thesis.

58

Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, UK: Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019).

59

As clarification. The fictional narrative is written by me, the author of this thesis, but in the fiction created for this chapter, the author remains unknown, adding to its intrigue

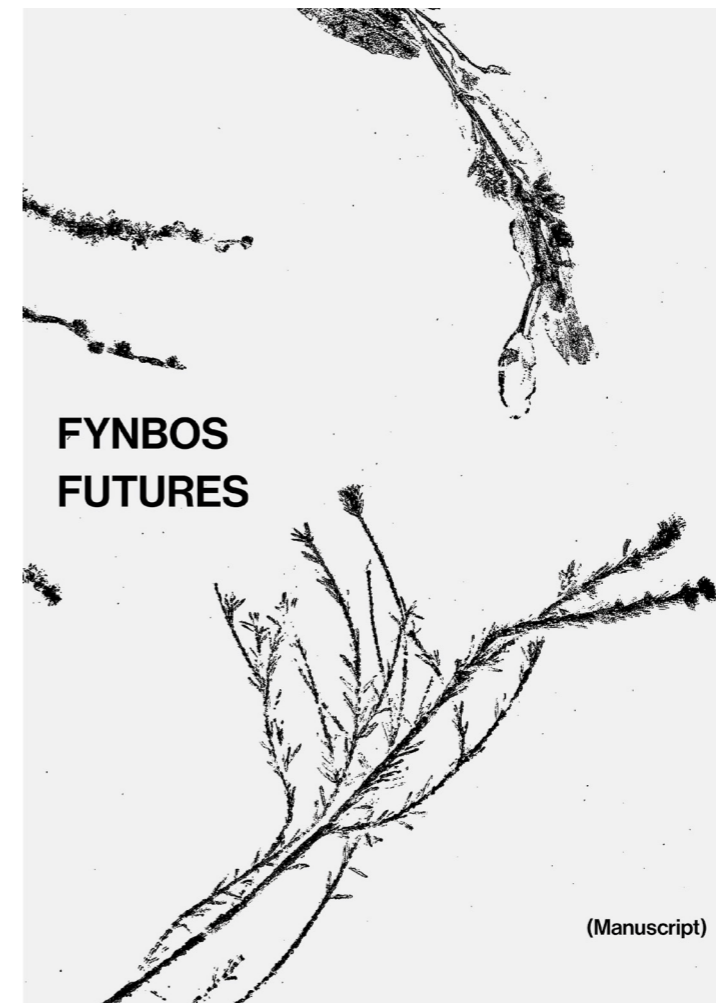


Figure 0.14: Cover of the Manuscript for the imagined fictional Novel *Fynbos Futures*

mutations, as its stories spread through the city, is presented as an imaginary of what the Future of the Cape Flats could look like. The fictional narrative take place in the Cape Flats in the year 2040 and embraces precarity and coexistence, advocating for forms of life that resist extractive systems and engage in mutual transformation. This chapter builds on the theory that fiction, when deployed strategically, generates friction by exposing overlooked contradictions and envisioning grounded speculative futures, which could lead to realities.

Part 06: Images of the Future: Re-imagining the Cape Flats

The final part of the thesis speculates on what the future of the Cape Flats could look like if the mechanism of fiction-friction was strong enough to turn the speculative imaginaries of *Fynbos Futures* into reality. It presents a triptych of the future, in which relationality, entanglement, and coexistence are spatialized into tangible forms, presented as the amphibious-, contaminated- and temporal territories.

These future scenarios are grounded in the realities of the Cape Flats, making them more than just abstract utopias. The chapter intentionally has no definitive endpoint, emphasising that these images of the future are not solutions, but provocations, and concludes that the thesis advocates for open-ended narratives as processes of continues negotiations that evolve over time, adapting to new contexts and challenges.

01



Cyanotype print of a Spiderhead plant, its bud and its bloom. Made by author and Spiderhead

A Contested Territory

Frictions on the Flats

A Contested Territory: Frictions on the Flats

The Cape Flats represents a territory shaped by layered histories of dispossession, exclusion, and alienation. It is a contested landscape where friction arises between ecological systems, socio-political structures, and human inhabitation. This chapter begins by identifying the precarious conditions of the site, focusing on the intertwined tendencies of exclusion and alienation as recurring realities in both human and non-human realms. The Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, the most endangered type of fynbos, mirrors the precarious existence of the area's marginalized communities, highlighting a parallel between ecological vulnerability and socio-economic marginalization. Understanding these forms of exclusion and alienation is essential for developing a speculative narrative that moves beyond abstract utopias and instead proposes possibilities rooted in the realities of the site. These possibilities emerge from the tension between what exists and what could be, embracing fragments, remnants, and potentials often excluded from dominant visions of the city. By situating the reader within the Cape Flats' current state in 2024, this chapter reveals the lasting effects of inequality and exclusion in Cape Town, a divided city where spatial and ecological injustices remain pervasive. The precarious condition of the territory serves as the foundation for envisioning speculative futures that seek to reimagine relationships between people, plants, and place.



Figure 1.1: Photograph of the Fynbos plant, the *Peninsula Bloodroot*, taken and edited by author

The Fynbos plants are introduced as plants that have for ages been able to thrive in their precarious environment. However, with the pressures of climate change and a growing urban population, the Fynbos has seen significant decline since European settlement at the Cape in the nineteenth century. The great diversity and endemism¹ alongside the serious threat of extinction of the Fynbos has contributed to their biome being included in Conservation International's biodiversity hotspots. Which has led to increasing conservation efforts by the City of Cape Town and the South African government. However, the most threatened of all Fynbos types, the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, that only grows on the lowlands of the city, is still teetering on the edge of extinction. Historically the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos have been excluded from fynbos narratives, as they only grow on the dry sandy plains of the Cape Flats, in contrast to the perceived image of the

lush Fynbos growing on the slopes of the mountain. To contribute to the exclusion of Cape Flats sand fynbos, the Cape Flats, is the historical dumping ground of the Apartheid government, where non-white residents were displaced to under the Group Areas Act.²

Despite efforts to de-segregate the city since the turn to democracy in 1994, the city of Cape Town remains one of the most unequal cities in the world, today divided not by race, but by class and the Cape Flats, and its Fynbos remains alienated from the rest of the city. Following the discussion of the contested territory and its plants, the inadequacy of current conservation and urban strategies are highlighted, and it is proposed that change can only come from a complete re-imagining of the city's connection to the Fynbos, where the binary between urban and natural is overcome.

¹ Endemism is the state of a species being found only in a single defined geographic location and occurring nowhere else naturally.

² The Group Areas Act was a cornerstone of apartheid in South Africa, forcibly segregating residential and business areas by race, displacing people of colour to underdeveloped regions while reserving prime urban areas for white citizens.

The Fynbos

Introducing the plants

Precarity is defined by anthropologist Anna Tsing as a “life without the promise of stability”, or in other words a way of being marked by indeterminacy that is more the condition than the exception of our times.³ The condition Cape Town finds itself in, within the current climate and socio-economic crisis, mass migrations to the city and a colonial and apartheid legacy, is one of precarity. Thus, a re-imagining of how to live in this condition of uncertainty, is necessary. Looking at how the fynbos plants have adapted to precarious conditions, might help imagine new ways of being on a damaged planet.

The Fynbos plants of the Cape Floristic Region of South Africa, thrive in precarity. They only grow in acidic, nutrient poor soils and need fire to generate life. The Fynbos biome is an evergreen shrubland characterised by the presence of three plant types. The first being restios, wiry flowering reed-like graminoids⁴, the second being ericoid shrubs, plants with needle-like leaves and the last but not the least, the overcover proteoid plants known for their unique shapes, colours, and striking blooms (see figure 1.2).⁵ The genus *Protea* was renamed⁶ in 1735 by Carl Linnaeus⁷, after the Greek God Proteus, who was a shapeshifter. According to popular belief, the name was given to these plants because of the many different forms their flowers take. Proteas play an important role in South Africa, culturally as a national symbol and economically as a one of the country's major flower exports.⁸ All three plant types have distinct appearances, almost other worldly or alien in their uniqueness.

Living in Precarity

Four complex factors are paramount in Fynbos ecology and separates them from other biomes in South Africa and the world. These factors include the nutrient poor soils on which the plants grow, the seasonal conditions of hot and dry summers, and cold and wet winters typical of Mediterranean climates, fire intervals of five to fifty years (usually in the order of fifteen to twenty years), and a complex entanglement of animal plant interactions, especially in terms of pollination and seed dispersal⁹. The nutrient poor soils, and harsh summer heat pose serious ecological challenges to any plant wishing to grow in the region where Fynbos is found. Thus, these hardy plants have adapted specialised strategies for survival. The lack of nutrients limits the option of seasonal deciduousness, thus, Fynbos developed what ecologists call *Sclerophylly*. This is a method to effectively eliminate herbivory by possessing long-lasting, hard, leathery leaves that decompose slowly and have slow rates of nutrient cycling (see figure 1.3)¹⁰. Fynbos also poses specialised root adaptations, such as the high nutrient efficiency of the cluster roots of Proteas (see figure 1.4).¹¹

Perhaps the most significant adaptations of Fynbos plants are found in their relationship with Fire, which are frequent in the Cape of South Africa. Fires naturally occur at the end of the dry season in late summer and early autumn. *Serotiny* is a phenomenon only found in Fynbos plants. In this strategy, the plants possess fire-proof seedheads that

3 Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 2.

4 In botany and ecology, a graminoid refers to a herbaceous plant with a grass-like morphology, i.e. elongated culms with long, blade-like leaves.

5 Anthony G. Rebelo et al., “The Fynbos Biome,” in *The Vegetation of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*, ed. Ladislav Mucina and Michael C. Rutherford (Cape Town: Sanbi, 2005), 53–219.

6 Renamed is used intentionally, because even though they are lost to modern knowledge, these plants had indigenous names long before their classification by Linnaeus in the eighteenth century.

7 Carl Linnaeus was a Swedish biologist and physician who formalised binomial nomenclature, the modern system of naming organisms. He is widely regarded as the father of Western taxonomy.

8 See: Cheryl McEwan, “Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023): 1114–37.

9 Anthony G. Rebelo et al., “The Fynbos Biome,” in *The Vegetation of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*, ed. Ladislav Mucina and Michael C. Rutherford (Cape Town: Sanbi, 2005), 53–219.

10 *Ibid.*

11 C. Coetsee, W.J. Bond, and B.J. Wigley, “Forest and Fynbos Are Alternative States on the Same Nutrient Poor Geological Substrate,” *South African Journal of Botany* 101 (November 2015): 57–65.

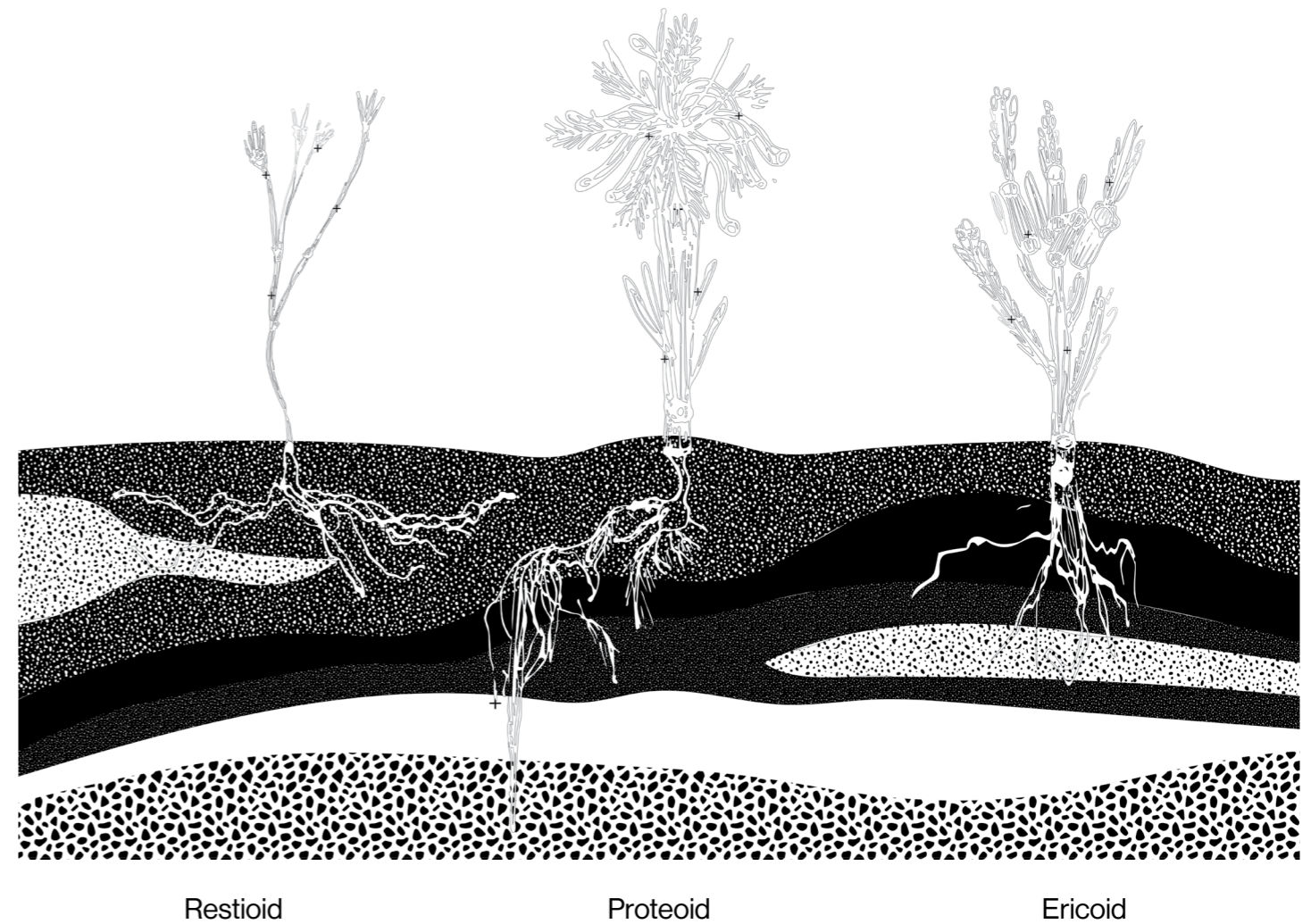


Figure 1.2: The Three Fynbos Plant Types. Drawing by author

only release seeds after a fire, ensuring re-growth after the decimation. *Myrmecochory* is another strategy found in fifteen percent of Fynbos species, here the plants depend on multi-species interactions by growing an ant-fruit or elaiosome¹² which ants bury in their nests, where the seeds lie dormant until after a fire.¹³ This leads to the last adaptation that will be mentioned, namely the incidence of smoke-induced seed germination. For many Fynbos plants, smoke is the only way of breaking dormancy and obtaining seedling plants.¹⁴ Thus, in Fynbos fire, does not only wreak destruction, but also brings new life, embracing cycles of life and death. These adaptations, thriving in nutrient-poor soils, requiring fire for regeneration, and depending

on multi-species interactions, demonstrate how life can flourish in challenging conditions.. The Fynbos' capacity to transform adversity into opportunity suggests that if we allowed ourselves to open our mind to the lives of plants, alternative imaginaries of life on a damaged planet can become possible.

12 Elaiosomes are fleshy structures that are attached to the seeds of many plant species. The elaiosome is rich in lipids and proteins, that attract ants for seed dispersal.

13 R. M. Cowling, D. M. Richardson, and Colin Paterson-Jones, *Fynbos: South Africa's Unique Floral Kingdom* (Vlaeberg: Fernwood Press, 1995).

14 Anthony G. Rebelo et al., “The Fynbos Biome,” in *The Vegetation of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*, ed. Ladislav Mucina and Michael C. Rutherford (Cape Town: Sanbi, 2005), 53–219.

On Exclusion

Fynbos and its unique biome have been recognised as under serious threat by climate change and the growing footprint of the cities built within the biome's boundaries. This thesis, focuses specifically on the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, located only within the boundaries of the rapidly expanding metropolitan city of Cape Town, and its condition as an overlooked vegetation type, excluded from Fynbos conservation narratives, and alienated from the human community of the Cape Flats, between which it grows. With some investigation this section will show how the Flats Fynbos faces, is inextricably tied to the condition of alienation and inequality rampant in the post-colonial, post-apartheid city of Cape Town and is rooted in the Western dualism of the separation of nature and culture and the marginalisation of the "other".



Figure 1.3: Line drawing tracings of Fynbos leaf monoprints. Made by author in collaboration with the Fynbos



Figure 1.4: Line drawing tracings of fynbos root monoprints. Made by author in collaboration with the Fynbos

A biodiversity hotspot

The Fynbos plants grow in the Cape Floristic region, which is the smallest and most biologically rich of the world's six floral kingdoms and the only one endemic to a single country, namely South Africa. It is one of the world's richest areas for plant life, representing less than zero-point-five percent of the African continent but containing twenty percent of its Flora. Sixty-nine percent of the estimated nine thousand plant species are endemic to the region, with 3087 of conservation concern and 1736 identified as vulnerable to extinction. The rich biodiversity of the region is under serious ecological threat, with the main reasons being urban sprawl and replacement of the vegetation by agricultural developments.¹⁵ The region's outstanding diversity, density and endemism of plants as well its conservation urgency led to its recognition as one of the world's thirty-six biodiversity hotspots, as identified

by Conservation International (figure 1.4).¹⁶ In a report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)¹⁷ in 2022 the long-term decline in plant biodiversity in Fynbos since the 1960s due to unhindered urbanization, ecosystem disruptions and climate change is listed as an environmental emergency.¹⁸

The term "biodiversity" was popularised in the 1980s, most notably through a symposium held in 1986 and a subsequent book *Biodiversity* edited by E. O. Wilson in 1988.¹⁹ Following this, Norman Meyers, an ecologist, introduced the concept of biodiversity hotspots in the same year, which he expanded on in his 1990 paper "Biodiversity Challenge: Expanded Hot-Spots Analysis", wherein he identified eighteen global regions that had extraordinary levels of plant endemism and significant habitat loss. Among Amazonia, the Mediterranean Basin and the forests of West Africa, the Cape Floristic region was

¹⁵ The City of Cape Town, "Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan," 2019.
¹⁶ See: <https://www.conservation.org/home>
¹⁷ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change, 1332.
¹⁸ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, "Sixth Assessment Report" (IPCC, 2022).
¹⁹ Edward Osborne Wilson, ed., *Biodiversity*. (Washington, DC: National Acad. Press, 1988).

²⁰ N. Myers, "The Biodiversity Challenge: Expanded Hot-Spots Analysis," *The Environmentalist* 10, no. 4 (1990): 243-56.
²¹ United Nations, "Article 2. Use of Terms," in *Convention on Biological Diversity*, 1992.
²² South Africa signed the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, commonly known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro. South Africa became a party to the CBD on November 2, 1995, after ratifying the convention.
²³ Agenda 21 is a comprehensive action plan adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit (UN Conference on Environment and Development) held in Rio de Janeiro. It provides a global blueprint for sustainable development, aiming to balance environmental conservation, economic growth, and social equity. The agenda is available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>

²⁴ Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, "Convention on Biological Diversity. Text and Annexes" (Montreal: United Nations Environment Programme, 2011).
²⁵ The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.
²⁶ See: <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>, for full list of goals.

Next page:
 Figure 1.5: Map of the World's Biodiversity Hotspots

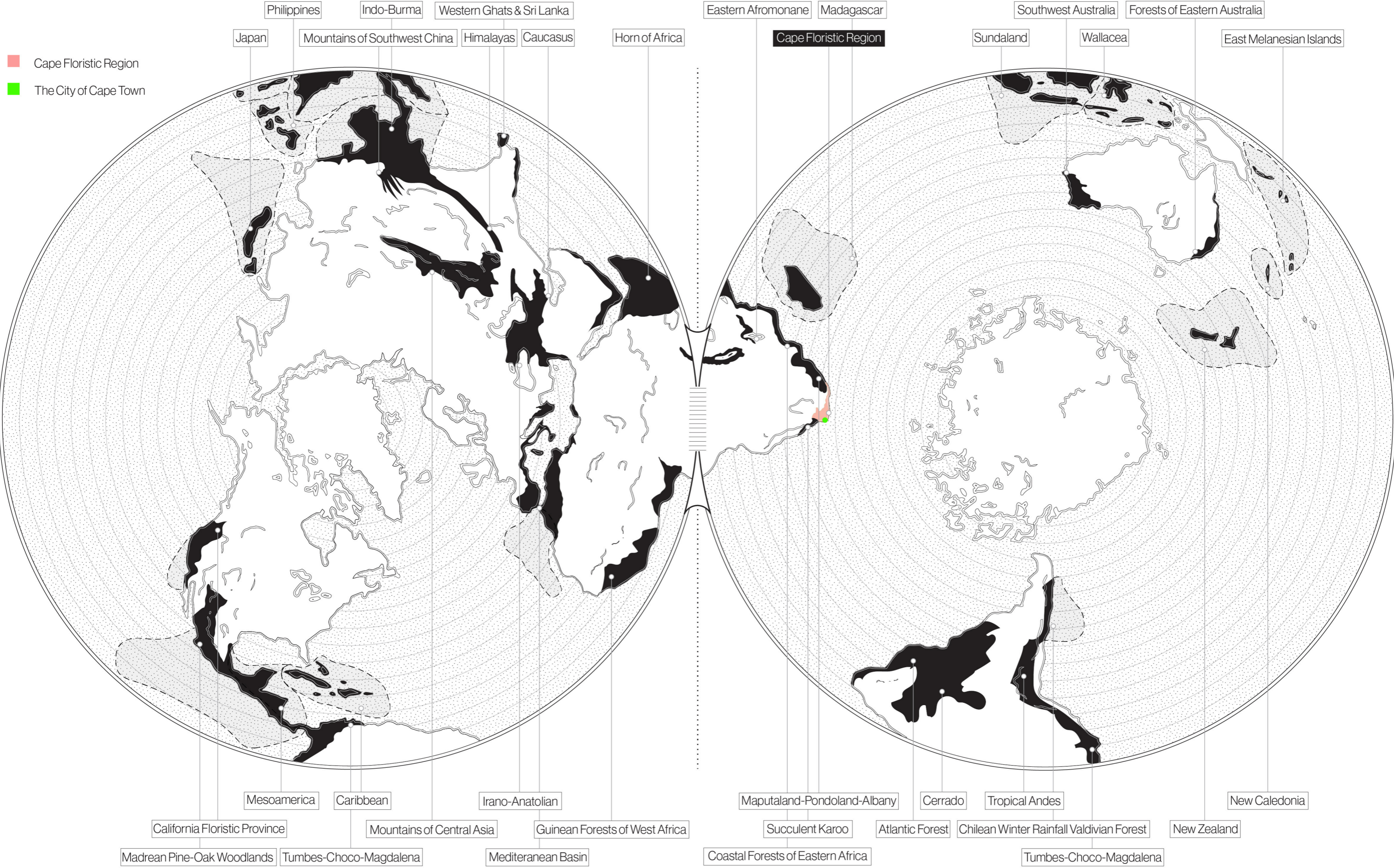
included in Meyer's original list of biodiversity hotspots.²⁰ Later, in 1992, the widely accepted definition of biodiversity was given at the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro as: "the variability among living organisms from all sources, including, inter alia, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part: this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems."²¹ At the summit, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), dedicated to sustainable development and conservation, was signed by 150 countries.²²

The CBD was conceived as a way to bring the principles of Agenda 21²³ into reality, by recognising that biological diversity includes not only the more-than-humans (such as plants and animals) and the health of ecosystems, but also includes human concerns for well-being and the need for food security, medicines, fresh air and water and shelter.²⁴ In 1999 the framework for biodiversity hotspot identification was refined and elaborated by Conservation International (CI). Initially the new framework expanded the original biodiversity hotspot list to twenty-five regions, with the eventually expansion to the thirty-six recognised today. Under the CI's criteria, a region is considered a biological hotspot if it contains a minimum of 1500 endemic plants, and if less than thirty percent of its historical vegetation extent remains.

Today, these hotspots cover only two-point-four percent of the planet's land surface but are home to more than half of the world's plant species and a significant proportion of animal species. In the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)²⁵ there are two statements connecting biodiversity and urbanization in the same frame of reference. Goal 11- Sustainable cities and communities, states that "...positive economic, social and environmental links [should be supported] between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning" and Goal 15- Life on land, that "...ecosystem and biodiversity values [should be integrated] into national and local planning and development processes".²⁶ The sustainable development goals of the

Biodiversity Hotspots

- Cape Floristic Region
- The City of Cape Town



United Nations, and the United Nations as organisation is not without scrutiny, and this thesis does not believe that the ineffective policies of the COP's are enough to continue living on a damaged planet, preferring instead more radical approaches that lead to a completely new and entangled way of life. However, these goals are important to note as they hint towards the breakdown of the dualism between conservation and urbanisation rooted in the divide between nature and culture ingrained in Western culture²⁷, wherein conservation was excluded from the urban realm and *vica versa*.²⁸

Beyond Universalism: Rethinking Biodiversity Through Pluriversal Ecologies

While the SDGs represent an important step in recognizing the interconnectedness of conservation and urbanization, they remain rooted in a framework that treats biodiversity as a quantifiable, universal value. Contemporary thinkers like Arturo Escobar have challenged this universalism, arguing instead for a pluriversal perspective that embraces the multiplicity of life-worlds and knowledge systems beyond Western modernity.²⁹ Escobar critiques the dualism between nature and culture that underpins Western approaches to conservation, proposing instead a relational ontology that recognizes the entanglement of humans, more-than-humans, and ecosystems.³⁰ Similarly, Emanuele Coccia emphasizes the interconnected nature of all living beings, describing the atmosphere as a shared medium where plants and humans constantly exchange life and meaning.³¹ Stefano Mancuso, from a botanical perspective, underscores the agency of plants as active participants in ecosystems, capable of communication, adaptation, and environmental transformation.³²

This thesis adopts these perspectives to argue that biodiversity is not merely a measure of species richness or ecosystem health but a dynamic and relational concept that encompasses the multiplicity of life and the entangled relationships that sustain it. By

incorporating these views, this thesis critiques the inadequacy of current conservation frameworks, and instead advocates for radical approaches that lead to a fundamentally new way of life—one that dissolves the boundaries between urban and ecological, human and nonhuman, and local and global. The Cape Floristic Region, as one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, serves as a microcosm for exploring this entangled vision of biodiversity and the possibilities it holds for imagining inclusive, post-natural futures.

Cape Town as Hotspot City

Cities are home to more than half of the world's human population and are responsible for a disproportionately large ecological footprint. Many urban areas contain high levels of biodiversity, and 423 cities lie within recognised biodiversity hotspots³³. However, cities have traditionally been seen as spaces where nature ends and urbanism begins, a perspective that remains widespread in many contemporary urban policy practices³⁴ and one that needs to be contested if the aim is to live better on a damaged planet. In research done by landscape architects at the University of Pennsylvania, wherein conflicts between urbanisation and conservation in hotspot cities was investigated, thirty-three cities were flagged as the biggest conflict zones³⁵.

One of these cities was the Metropolitan city of Cape Town, situated in the Fynbos biome, comprising the South-West biogeographical region of the Cape Floristic Region³⁶. Within Cape Town's 2460 square kilometre footprint, is a diverse geography of mountain ranges (including the Table Mountain National Park), the Cape Peninsula coastline, lowland vegetated areas, sixteen nature reserves and the built environment of the city. The boundaries of the city coincide with an extremely high concentration of irreplaceable biodiversity. A sixth of South Africa's plants are found in Cape Town, which is a remarkable number when considering that the city covers less than zero-point-one percent of the land area of the country. Occurring within the city are 3350 plant

27 This will be explored more in depth in Part 02: *A Framework for the Future*.
 28 Ian R. Cook and Erik Swyngedouw, "Cities, Social Cohesion and the Environment: Towards a Future Research Agenda," *Urban Studies* 49, no. 9 (May 23, 2012): 1959–79.
 29 Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Duke Univ Press, 2018).
 30 Arturo Escobar, *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life, Redes* (Duke University Press, 2008).
 31 Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019).
 32 See for example: Stefano Mancuso, *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence* (Washington: Island Press, 2015).
 33 See: James R. Miller and Richard J. Hobbs, "Conservation Where People Live and Work," *Conservation Biology* 16, no. 2 (April 2002): 330–37; Russell A. Mittermeier et al., "Global Biodiversity Conservation: The Critical Role of Hotspots," Richard Weller, Zuzanna Drozd, and Sara Padgett Kjaersgaard, "Hotspot Cities: Identifying Peri-Urban Conflict Zones in the World's Biodiversity Hotspots," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 8–19.
 34 Ian R. Cook and Erik Swyngedouw, "Cities, Social Cohesion and the Environment: Towards a Future Research Agenda," *Urban Studies* 49, no. 9 (May 23, 2012): 1959–79.
 35 Richard Weller, Zuzanna Drozd, and Sara Padgett Kjaersgaard, "Hotspot Cities: Identifying Peri-Urban Conflict Zones in the World's Biodiversity Hotspots," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 8–19.
 36 Anthony G. Rebelo et al., "The Fynbos Biome," in *The Vegetation of South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland*, ed. Ladislav Mucina and Michael C. Rutherford (Cape Town: Sanbi, 2005), 53–219.



Figure 1.6: Fire is an essential part of the Fynbos growth cycle, however urbanisation and climate change are causing fires to be more frequent, endangering the plants and city

species, representing a third of all the species found in the Cape Floristic region, of which a hundred-and-ninety are endemic, and two-hundred different vegetation types, of which six are only found within the city limits (four of which are types of Fynbos).³⁷ Unfortunately due to the transformation of the territory through urbanisation and agriculture, as well as the pressures of climate change, Cape Town has already lost forty-nine plant species of which fourteen are now globally extinct, and contains four-hundred other species threatened to the point of extinction.

Along with its rich plant diversity, the city also harbours four-hundred-and-four types of birds, of which six are endemic to the Fynbos biome within the city, eighty-three mammals, a remarkable sixty reptiles of which eight are threatened with extinction and twenty-seven amphibians with eleven threatened with extinction.³⁸ Already in 2007, the Cities Alliance³⁹ listed Cape Town as one of the world's mega-disaster areas, which they defined as an area that has already lost or is on the verge of losing a significant part of its biodiversity, stating that:

“...the extinction rates for the city are the highest for any metropolitan area in the world.”⁴⁰

With so much more-than-human life concentrated within the urban space of Cape Town, the greatest threat to these lives is urbanisation. Even fire, which has historically meant new life in fynbos biomes now contribute to its decline, with an increased incidence of man-made fires in the city due to an increasing population density as well as a rise in temperatures under the current climate crisis, fires have become more frequent, endangering slower-growing fynbos species.⁴¹

Urbanisation in the Hotspot City

The high rate of urbanisation in Cape Town relates to the high rate of population growth of the city. It is a rapidly growing urban centre with an estimated population of 4,9 million people in 2024 and has the highest per capita population growth of any of the cities in South Africa. The city has been steadily growing by two to three percent annually since the start of the twentieth century (see figure 1.6). Many migrants from other provinces within South Africa as well as its bordering nations move here because of its status as an economic hub in Southern Africa. However, the city, its current policies toward urban nature, spatial development strategies and green infrastructures are struggling to keep up with the pace of migration into its territory. Furthermore, Cape Town continues to grapple with poverty, unemployment and housing and development discrepancies that remain from Apartheid.⁴² The city exemplifies the challenges faced by developing nations, where building the nation's economy to extend services, reduce the wealth gap and to ensure equitable social opportunities to all communities is balanced against eroding the natural landscape.

The Biodiversity Network Plan

To address this, the city with arguably the greatest biodiversity and greatest threat to that biodiversity in the world developed a comprehensive, systematic, and spatially explicit biodiversity conservation network in 2015, named the biodiversity network plan (Bionet).⁴³ However, ten years after its conception and despite the commitment to planning for biodiversity conservation, implementation of many of Bionet's strategies are yet to be realised or have been realised with little to no effect, while the territory of Fynbos plants within the city continues to dwindle with the increase of urban sprawl and informal development.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, merely offering anti-sprawl rhetoric or making superficial recommendations in planning documents that nod to the Convention on Biological Diversity and the SDGs is insufficient. The approach of designating isolated protected areas such as in Bionet assumes a static territory, yet the reality in this age of rapid urbanization and climate change is quite the opposite. Thus, this thesis will propose a complete reimagining of the city's relationship with its urban nature specifically to the Fynbos plants that grow within its limits.

The excluded – Cape Flats Sand Fynbos

In Cape Town, there is a cultural sentiment towards conserving fynbos as part of the city's natural heritage. However, this sentiment is tainted with colonial and apartheid legacies and is disproportionately still in the hands of white citizens. This trend will be discussed more in depth in Chapter 03, what is important to note now is that Fynbos is still deeply associated with the mountain and the city's inner core. As reflected in the Bionet plan. The lowlands of Cape Town are often overlooked in terms of its ecological significance. However, the most critically endangered type of Fynbos, the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos (from here on referred to as the Flats Fynbos) only grows on the Cape Flats lowlands of Cape Town. In the journal article "The Red list of South African" *plants* is written:

“Indeed, the Cape Flats... are today home to the greatest concentration of endangered and critically endangered plants in South Africa and possibly the world.”⁴⁵

43
ICLEI, "Case Study: Assessing the Natural Assets of Cape Town, South Africa," 2016.

44
Richard Weller, Zuzanna Drozd, and Sara Padgett Kjaersgaard, "Hotspot Cities: Identifying Peri-Urban Conflict Zones in the World's Biodiversity Hotspots," *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 14, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 8–19

45
Domitilla Raimondo, "The Red List of South African Plants – a Global First," *South African Journal of Science* 107, no. 3/4 (March 2011).

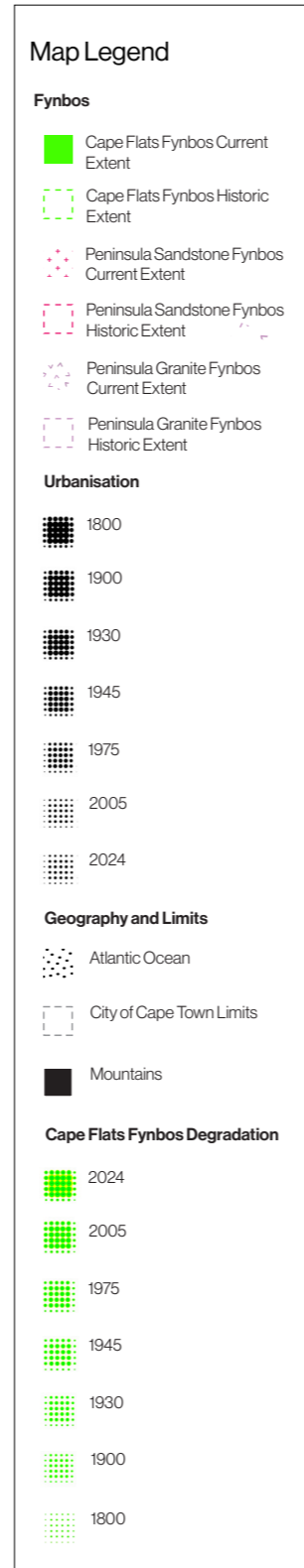
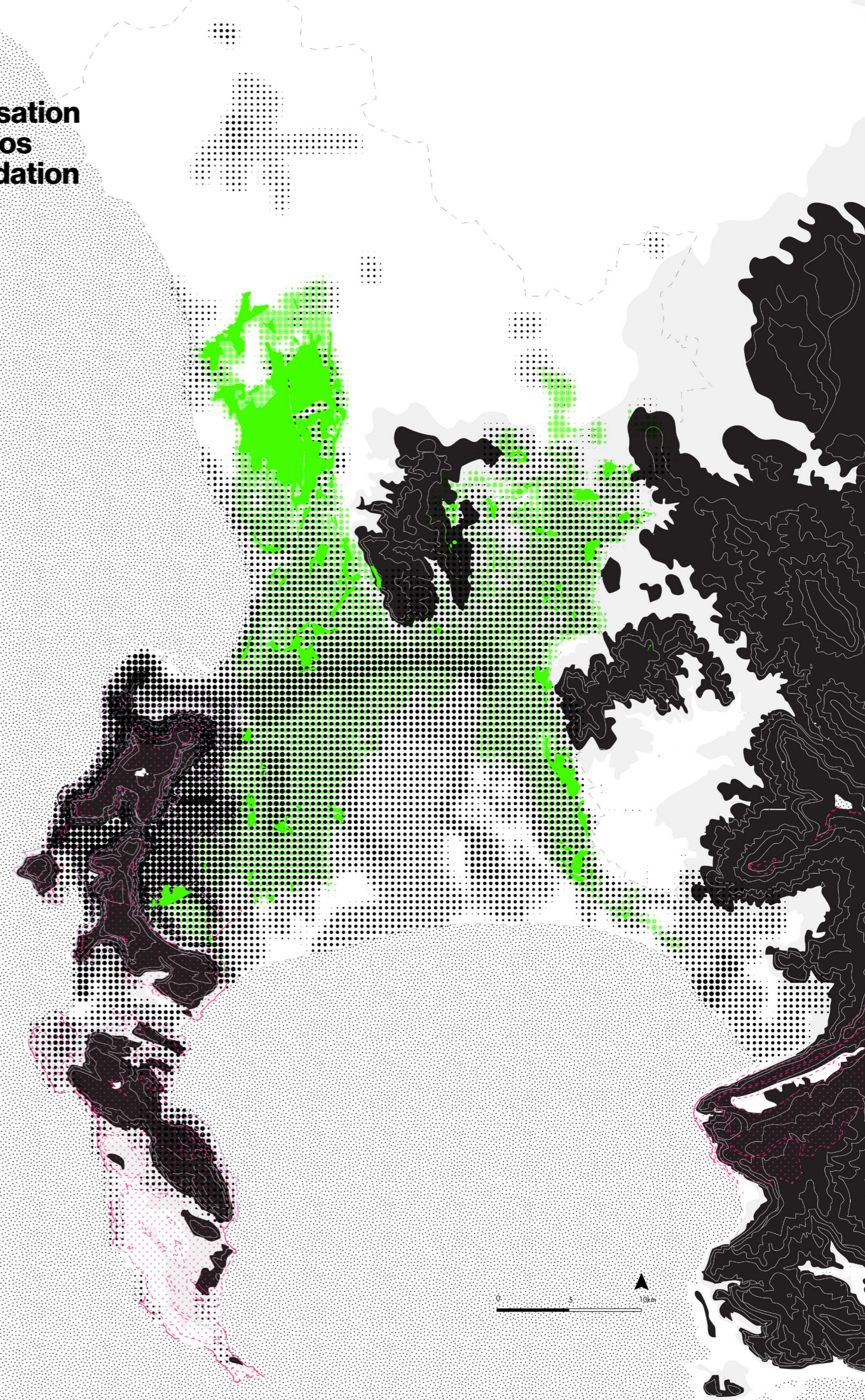


Figure 1.7: Map of the Urbanisation and Fynbos Degradation in the City of Cape Town

Urbanisation & Fynbos Degradation



The Flats Fynbos is only found within the boundaries of Cape Town. Historically growing in the Cape Flats from Blaauwberg Hill in the West to Lakeside in the South, to Klipmuts and Joostenberg Hill in the East as well as Southwest of Bottelary Hills to Macassar in the South, following the geography of the acid sands of the territory, the only soil in which this vegetation grows (figure 1.8). This acid sand comprises dunes and alluvial sands that are old and have leached so that they have been striped of all seashells and nutrients, forming deep white sand (figure 1.10). Historically the Flats contained a series of wetlands that were seasonally waterlogged. However, changes to the hydrology of the area resulting from urbanisation, such as large-scale hardening of catchment areas, canalisation and drainage of streams and the lowering of water tables through borehole abstraction from the Cape Flats aquifer to provide water for the city, has altered the ecosystem functioning in the wetlands and only a few areas remain today, the rest of the territory transformed to all-year sandy plains.

Urbanisation, Conservation, and the Marginalisation of Flats Fynbos

The changes to the territory related to urbanisation has left only four-point-five percent of the previous extent of the territory of the Flats Fynbos remaining, and the rest of the biome is threatened by further development.⁴⁶ It is the most transformed of the Fynbos types, with eighty-five percent transformed by urban sprawl and small pockets of agriculture, and a hundred-and-eight species critically endangered. Only extremely small areas of the lowland vegetation are formally conserved, amounting to about one percent, the rest, growing on vacant lots, brownfield sites and undeveloped open space, that without planned intervention, are continuously being encroached on by the growing city. The conserved sites are also mismanaged in terms of mowing and fire management. Mowing eliminates cone-bearing and taller shrubs while fire protection disrupts the Fynbos' natural cycles of regeneration and allows them to become replaced by other species.

46
The City of Cape Town, "Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan" 2019.

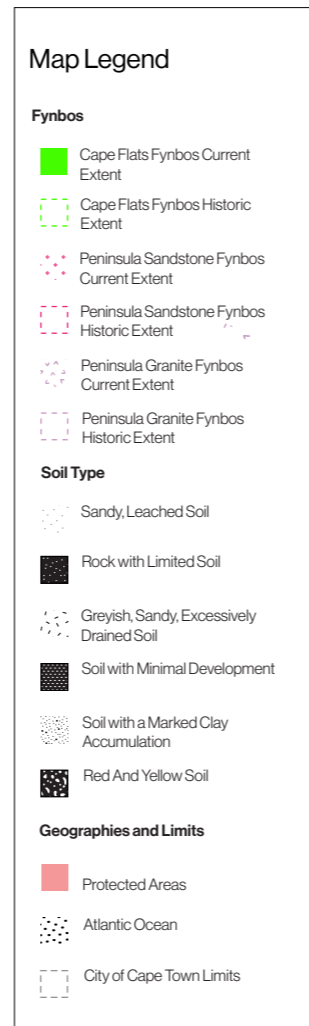
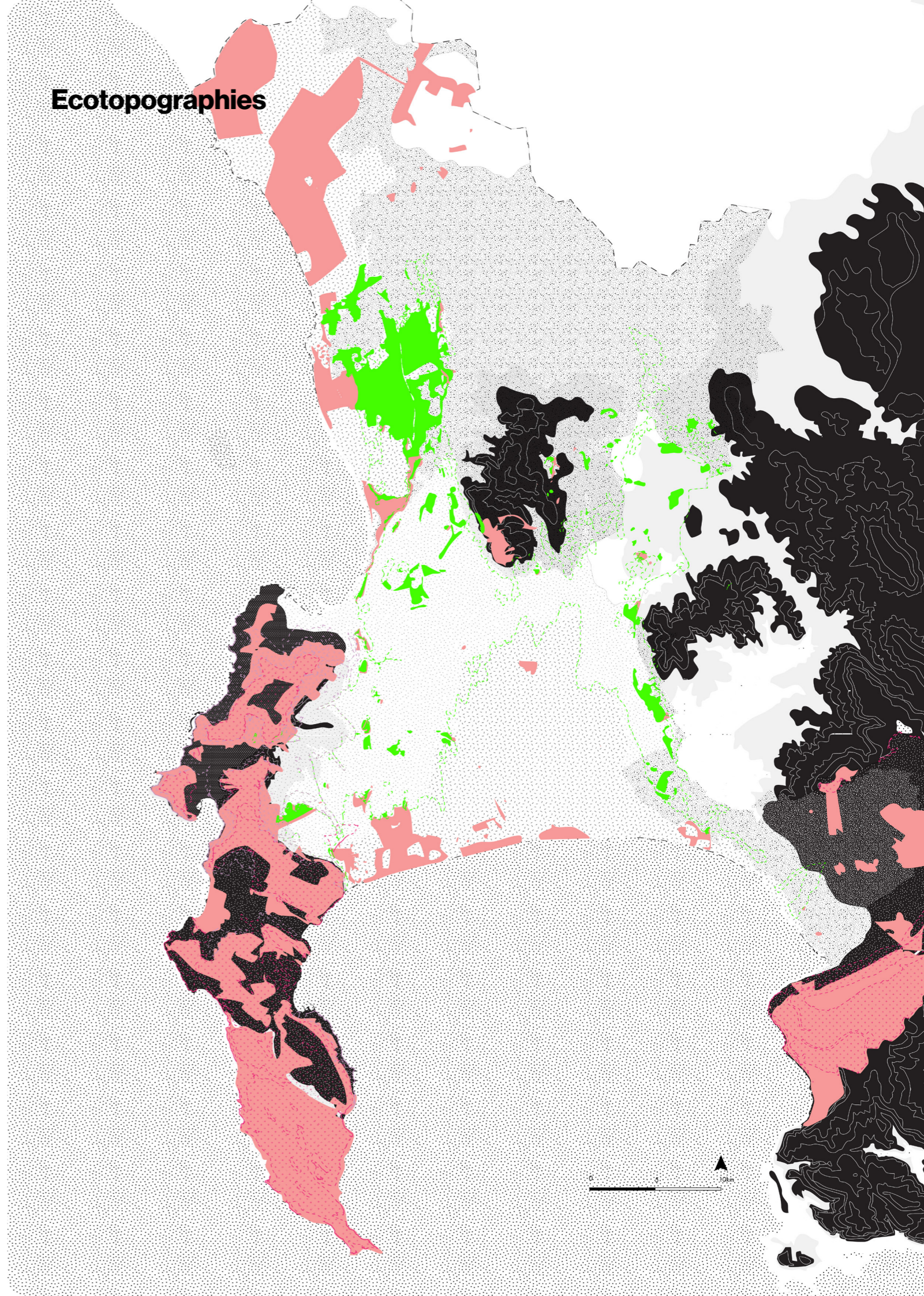


Figure 1.8: Map of the Geology, Fynbos and Conservation areas in the City of Cape Town



It is important to note the difference in conservation efforts between the two types of mountain fynbos endemic to the city and the othered⁴⁷ sand fynbos. The Peninsula Sandstone Fynbos, that grows on and in the shadow of the mountain, is seven percent statutorily conserved and the Peninsula Granite Fynbos, that grows at the foot of the mountain and fringes the historic city is thirty percent conserved.⁴⁸ The exclusion of the Flats Fynbos from conservation is a symptom of their locality on the Cape Flats, the area most affected by urban sprawl, due to lack of adequate planning. In apartheid planning, little to no attention was paid to green space in the sites where non-whites were forcibly removed to. The Cape Flats was used by the Apartheid government as a political dumping ground, and today still, the city remains socially, economically, and infrastructurally divided between the city's historical core, its mountainside settlement and the flats.⁴⁹ As landscape architect Stålhammar writes:



Figure 1.9: A Critically endangered species of Fynbos, the *Strawberry Spiderhead*

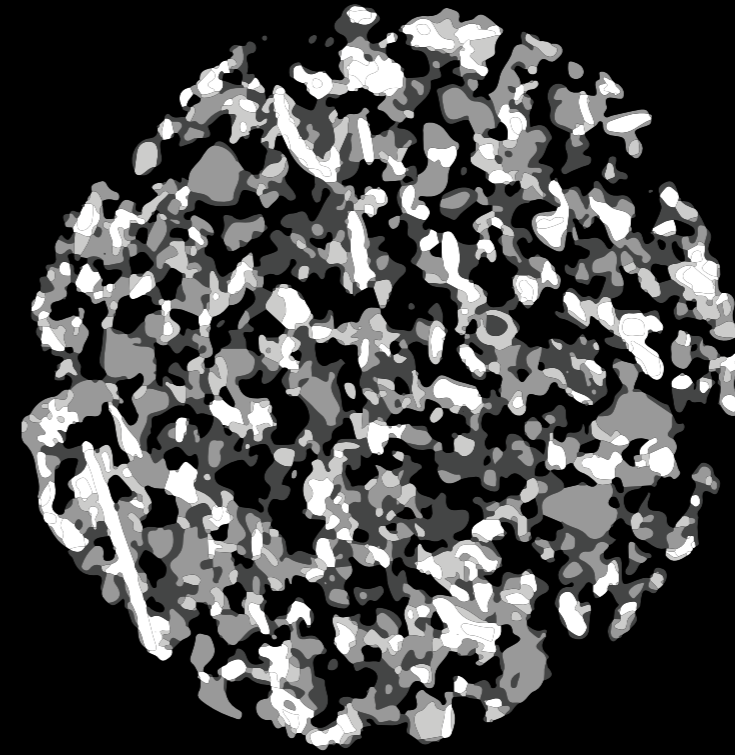


Figure 1.10: Scan of Cape Flats sand

“Urban planning under apartheid stratified settlements and access to resources and green space in the city into strict zones of different racial groups, which still persist today”.⁵⁰

This historic planning has upheld segregation and still tends to prevent access to conservation areas by socio-economically underprivileged communities.⁵¹ This alienation between the Cape Flats territory and the inner city, will be discussed in the next section.

⁴⁷ Othered here is used to show the exclusion of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos as a Fynbos plant and worthy of conservation like its mountain fynbos kin. The concept of the other will be investigated in detail in part 02: *A Framework for the Future*.

⁴⁸ The City of Cape Town, “Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan,” 2019.

⁴⁹ See: Ivan Turok, “Persistent Polarisation Post-Apartheid? Progress towards Urban Integration in Cape Town,” *Urban Studies* 38, no. 13 (December 2001): 2349–77, and Sanna Stålhammar, “Polarised Views of Urban Biodiversity and the Role of Socio-Cultural Valuation: Lessons from Cape Town,” *Ecosystem Services* 47, no. 101239 (February 2021).

⁵⁰ Sanna Stålhammar, “Polarised Views of Urban Biodiversity and the Role of Socio-Cultural Valuation: Lessons from Cape Town,” *Ecosystem Services* 47, no. 101239 (February 2021).

⁵¹ Ivan Turok, “Persistent Polarisation Post-Apartheid? Progress towards Urban Integration in Cape Town,” *Urban Studies* 38, no. 13 (December 2001): 2349–77.

The Flats

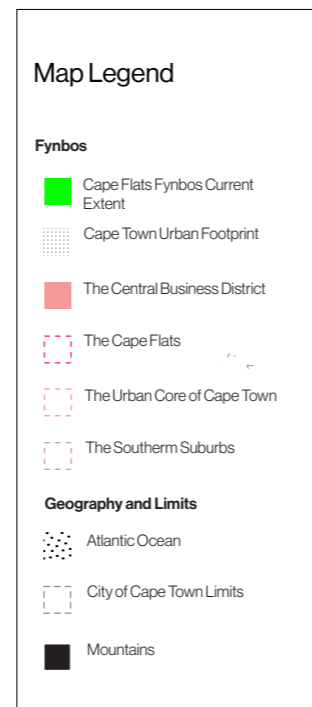
Introducing the territory

The Cape flats is a territory where inequality, exclusion and alienation are synonymous with the landscape. However, this thesis proposes that by allowing the complexity and vibrancy of the human lives of the territory to entangle with the more-than-human lives of the flats Fynbos, new imaginaries for futures rooted in justice, inclusion and equity can start germinating. Thus, an introduction of the territory as a site of friction, but also of hope is necessary. The territory lies fifteen kilometres from the historical core and central business district of the city and is bordered on the West by the Peninsula Mountain chain and by the Hottentots Holland mountains and elevated regions of the interior Boland, in the East (see figure 1.10) It is characterised by sandy plains, harsh winds and a dense and rapidly expanding urban footprint. Today, it is a complex and diverse area characterized by social, economic, and environmental challenges, as well as community resilience.

Historical Legacies and the Urban Fabric of the Flats

The urban fabric of the Cape Flats is shaped by its historical, socio-economic, and environmental context, resulting in a spatial pattern that reflects the legacies of apartheid urban planning and the ongoing challenges of rapid urban development. The built environment consists mainly of residential buildings dappled with state infrastructure such as schools and clinics, with some businesses and mixed-use development along the main transport corridors. As the development of the Cape Flats was an apartheid endeavour township⁵² and housing

52
In the South African and Cape Town context, "townships" refer to underdeveloped urban areas that were racially segregated and designated for non-white residents during apartheid. These areas were created under laws like the Group Areas Act to enforce the spatial separation of racial groups, often located on the peripheries of cities and characterized by inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, and limited access to economic opportunities.



Cape Town Locality Map

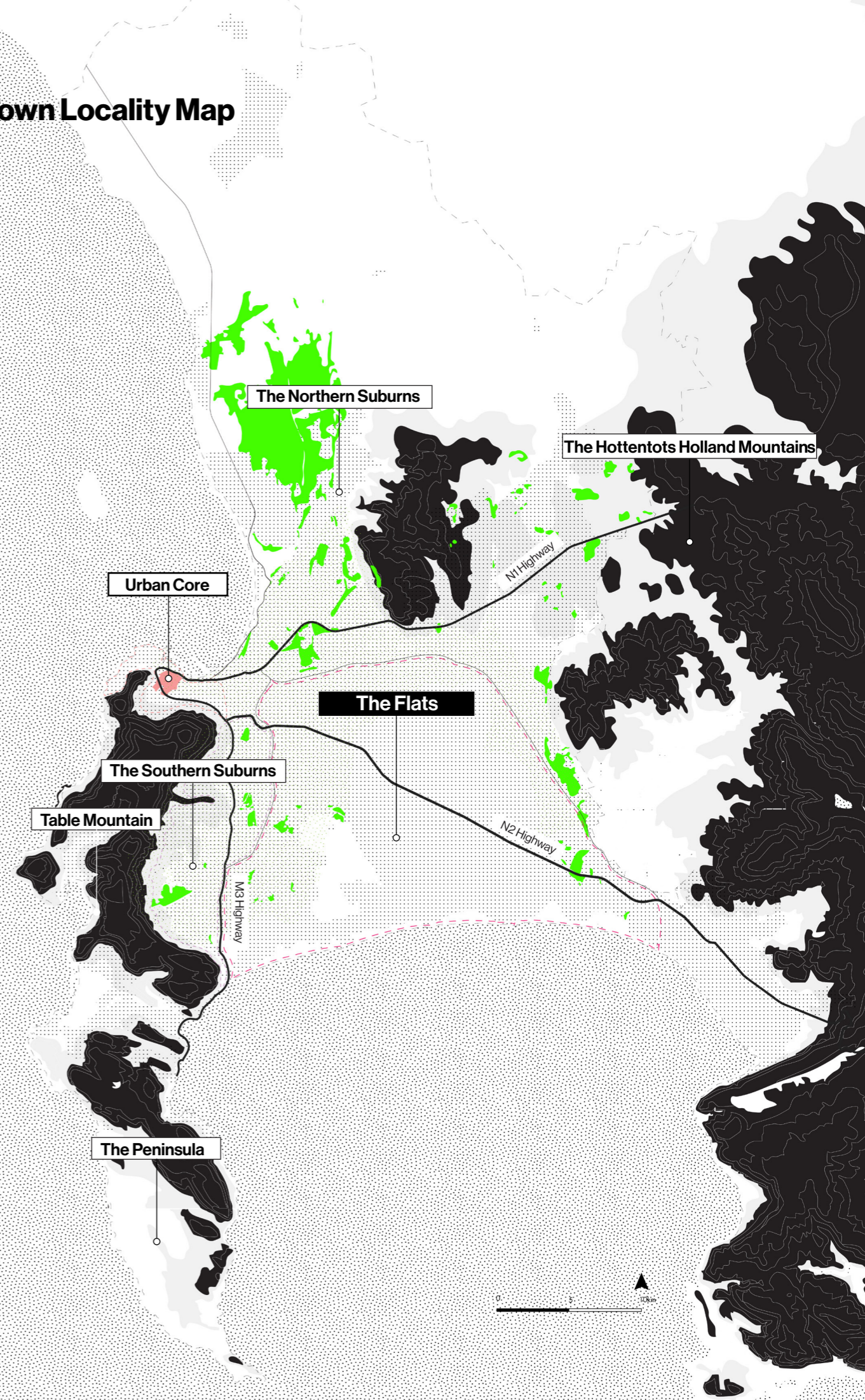


Figure 1.10: Cape Flats Locality Map

estates, wherein the housing is often uniform with rows of apartment blocks and free-standing houses with newly added backyard dwellings to provide additional housing (see figure 1.11-1.13), make up a large amount of the fabric, example neighbourhoods include Manenberg, Mitchell's Plein, Lavendar Hill and Khayelitsha. Since the end of apartheid, the Flats have seen an informal land use growth, with informal settlements such as Enkanini, Monwabisi Park, and Congo, characterized by densely packed shacks⁵³ mainly located on the periphery of formal settlements, becoming an increasingly larger part of the urban fabric.⁵⁴

Barriers to Growth: Challenges faced in the Cape Flats

The lack of an established economic sector in the Cape Flats is an apartheid zoning legacy and leads to communities living here needing to travel far to get to their places of work in the CBD or Southern suburbs, to which the territory is connected via the N2 and M3 public infrastructure roads. Minibus taxis are the most common mode of transportation, offering flexible routes but operating within a largely unregulated system. However, more formalised options are available in the Golden Arrow and MyCiTi bus services, though coverage is limited in some areas. A rail infrastructure also exists but is often unreliable due to underinvestment. Today the Flats are seeing an increase in mixed-used development aiming to combine residential, commercial, and recreational spaces hoping to create a more integrated urban environment with less need to travel far from one's home for work. Open spaces, parks and sports field are present, but are often poorly maintained, and many informal recreational spaces such as vacant lots are used for sports or socialising despite their degraded condition. However, many of these spaces are considered dangerous and are avoided by members of the community. In the Flats, the major transport corridors, vacant land, and environmental corridors often act as physical and symbolic barriers to integration. The main challenges faced in the

urban fabric is the high population density that strains existing infrastructure and services and inadequate infrastructure like poor road maintenance, limited public transport access, and insufficient sanitation (figure 1.16).

The social and economic reality in the Cape Flats is that many residents face poverty, high rates of unemployment, limited access to quality education and healthcare and the highest amount of gang-activity and crime-rates in the city. Of the community, forty-four percent are employed and eighteen percent unemployed, with the remaining thirty eight percent classified as not economically active. Schools vary in quality, with overcrowding and under-resourcing common in public institutions. The Cape Flats community lags behind the city of Cape Town average in terms of education, with twenty eight percent graduating from high school, compared to the cities' average of thirty percent, and only nine percent continuing to higher education, compared to the cities' sixteen percent. Public clinics and hospitals serve the area, but lack the resources and staff afforded to the hospitals of the inner city.

Creative Identity and Resilience in the Cape Flats

The Cape Flats has a strong sense of community and a rich cultural heritage, particularly in the realms of music, art, and storytelling. This cultural vibrancy has been a source of resilience, fostering identity, solidarity, and creative expression. The Cape Flats' cultural landscape is a fusion of various ethnicities, languages, and traditions. This diversity is evident in the area's culinary offerings, linguistic variety, and art that celebrates both Coloured and African heritages. The Cape Flats has given rise to a unique musical identity, most notably Cape Jazz, a genre that blends local traditions with global influences. Pioneers such as Abdullah Ibrahim and Basil Coetzee emerged from the Flats, using their music to tell stories of displacement, resilience, and hope. The annual Cape Minstrels Carnival, or *Kaapse Klopse*⁵⁵, is another hallmark of the area's

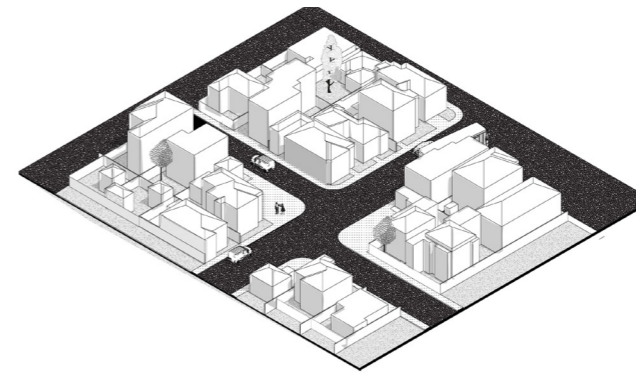


Figure 1.11: Typical houses on the Cape Flats. Apartheid planning created rigidly planned neighbourhoods. Many residents built onto their houses, to expand the building footprint on their properties. Model draw from the Athlone neighbourhood

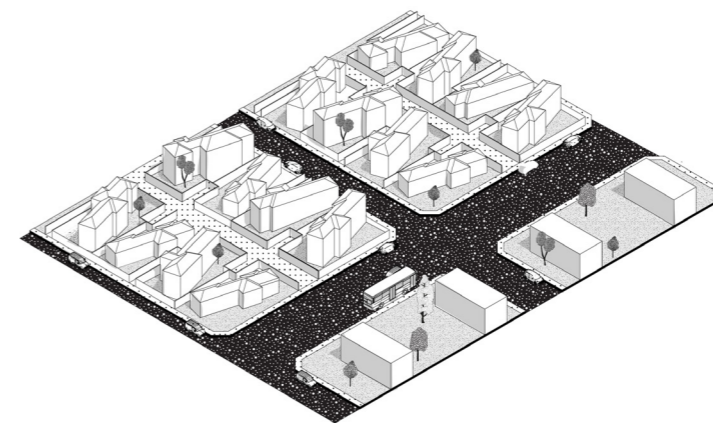


Figure 1.12: Typical Apartheid designed hostel blocks on the Cape Flats. These hostel blocks are often overcrowded. Model drawn from the Langa neighbourhood .

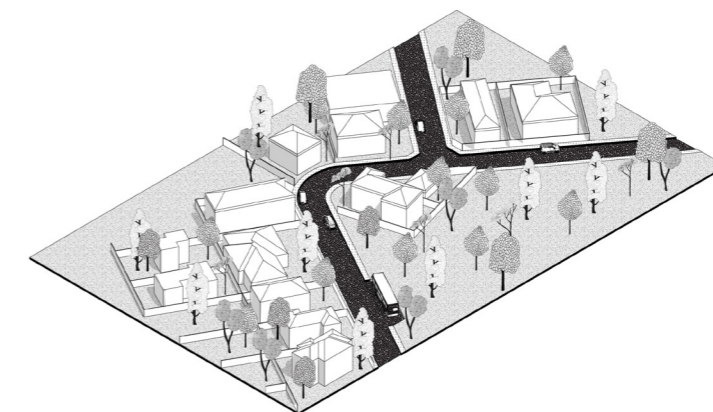


Figure 1.13: Typical houses in the Southern Suburbs. Houses have ample backyard space. Normally one family per property. Model draw from the Rondebosch neighbourhood

53
A shack in South Africa, common in informal settlements, is an improvised dwelling made from found materials such as corrugated metal, wood, and plastic and built without formal planning. These structures form a key part of the urban fabric of South African cities.

54
Jonathan Cinnamon and Tanner Noth, "Spatiotemporal Development of Informal Settlements in Cape Town, 2000 to 2020: An Open Data Approach," *Habitat International* 133, no. 102753 (March 2023).

55
As it is colloquially called in Cape Town.

56
Kwaito is a South African music genre that emerged in the 1990s, blending house, hip-hop, and African rhythms. Known for its catchy beats and local slang, it reflects the experiences of post-apartheid youth, addressing themes of identity, social change, and resilience.

cultural life (figure 1.15). Rooted in the histories of slavery and colonialism, the carnival is a celebration of the coloured community's identity through a display of music, and dance. Genres such as hip-hop, *kwaito*⁵⁶, and traditional African music are prevalent, with local artists often blending these styles to create unique sounds that resonate with the community. Visual arts also thrive in the Flats, with street art and murals transforming public spaces into vibrant canvases that reflect the area's socio-political narratives. Emerging local talents have used their work to critique systemic inequalities and to celebrate the community's resilience and aspirations. Poetry and storytelling further enrich the cultural landscape, serving as tools to preserve oral histories, pass down traditions, and challenge stereotypes. The Cape Flats' culinary traditions are another reflection of its cultural hybridity, blending Malay, African, and European influences. Iconic dishes like *koe'sisters*, and *bobotie*⁵⁷ often feature in community gatherings, reinforcing a sense of belonging and shared heritage. Community-driven cultural initiatives play a pivotal role in fostering unity and resilience among residents. Organizations and collectives often organize events, workshops, and exhibitions that promote cultural exchange and preserve the rich heritage of the Cape Flats.

These cultural expressions, rooted in a legacy of struggle and adaptation, are not just forms of entertainment or art they are acts of resistance and reclamation. They challenge the stigmas associated with the Cape Flats and assert the humanity, creativity, and resilience of its communities, inspiring both residents and outsiders to imagine new possibilities for this vibrant territory.⁵⁸

The Cape Flats embodies both the lasting impact of apartheid and the resilience of its communities. While systemic inequalities remain, the area's cultural vibrancy and strong sense of community provide a foundation for hope and potential change. It is a place where the complexities of a contested past, a challenging present, and an aspirational future intertwine in interesting ways, opening new imaginaries for different ways of living,

where equity is at the forefront of spatial configuration.

Of inequality

Cape Town is a divided city, with its unequal characteristics well documented by many urban geographers. It is often described as affluent, leafy suburbs following the contours of Table Mountain and the peninsula coastline, offering exceptional infrastructure and beautiful landscapes, juxtaposed against inhospitable dormitory and informal settlements on the tree-less, sandy plains of the Cape flats.⁵⁹ Although sometimes superlative, and ignoring the vibrant culture and life on the flats, these descriptions highlight the highly spatial ways in which these inequalities operate. As McDonald writes: "well to-do residents can live a life that is largely separated from their socio-economic other"⁶⁰ During apartheid people classified under the regime as black, coloured and Asian⁶¹ were forced to leave the urban core, where jobs and socio-economic, cultural and physical infrastructure were easily accessed, to the periphery, under the Group Areas Act of 1950⁶². To compound the segregation of different races, urban planning was used as one of the Apartheid government's sharpest tools, and its legacy is still felt in the inequality rampant in the city.

After Apartheid

The great challenge faced by the post-apartheid government can be seen in a map presented by one of the cities' senior planners during a presentation in 1993. The map illustrates the high concentration of opportunities in the inner city. The flats is portrayed as an economic void, with black and coloured communities excluded from the job-rich suburbs where quality education and infrastructure is available (see figure 1.16). Unfortunately, not much has changed since this presentation. Where other cities have experienced an exodus of jobs to satellite centres the suburbs and other parts of the

city, Cape town's CBD, located in the historic core, contains eighty percent of jobs, even though it only houses thirty seven percent of residents.⁶³

After apartheid, the South African government made limited progress in addressing the fragmented and unequal structure of its cities. While apartheid era legislation was repealed and institutions were restructured, there was no equivalent drive to implement a transformative vision for integrated urban spaces. Economic stagnation, caused by international sanctions and the turbulence of political transition, left limited public and private resources for investing in major urban restructuring projects. Although progressive policies were introduced, by the new ruling political party, they often lacked effective implementation.⁶⁴ Institutional practices remained conservative, poorly coordinated, and resistant to change. Bureaucratic inertia, combined with inexperience among new local political leaders, hindered cohesive responses to the spatial divides engrained in the urban fabric. Meanwhile, in an implicit political settlement with the white middle- and upper-class citizens the disruption of their lifestyles was avoided as far as possible, in exchange for their continued tax contributions. The transition to democracy also coincided with a global ideological shift favouring market-driven approaches and minimal state intervention, further undermining government spatial planning, a field already discredited by its association with apartheid policies and stifling creative strategies for urban integration and improvement.⁶⁵

The new government did however prioritise decent housing as a means to restore dignity to those oppressed under apartheid, promising households below a specified income level a free home on its own plot. Since the early 2000s, approximately 5,000 government-subsidised houses have been built annually in Cape Town, constituting about a quarter of all new housing and nearly half of the formal building fabric.⁶⁶ If this was well-planned and targeted at creating a more inclusive and ecologically sensitive city, it could have changed the city's physical growth pattern for

57

A *koesister* is a traditional Cape Malay pastry often described as a spicy doughnut finished off with a sprinkling of coconut. *Bobotie* is a South African dish consisting of spiced minced meat topped with a savoury custard-like egg mixture and baked.

58

For further reading see: Ruth Sacks, "Cape Flats: Music, Art, and Identity," *South African Journal of Cultural Studies* 48, no. 3 (2023): 97-112, Don Pinnock, *Cape Town: Cultural Reclamation and Resistance* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2015).

59

See for example: Mark Swilling and Amy Davison, *Sustaining Cape Town: Imagining a Liveable City* (Stellenbosch: Sun Media, 2010), David A. McDonald, *World City Syndrome: Neoliberalism and Inequality in Cape Town* (London: Routledge, 2009), E. A. Pieterse, *Counter-Currents: Experiments in Sustainability in the Cape Town Region* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2010) and Ivan Turok, Justin Visagie, and Andreas Scheb, "Social Inequality and Spatial Segregation in Cape Town," in *Urban Socio-Economic Segregation and Income Inequality. The Urban Book Series*, ed. Maarten van Ham et al. (Cham: Springer, 2021), 71-90.

60

David A. McDonald, *World City Syndrome: Neoliberalism and Inequality in Cape Town* (London: Routledge, 2009)

61

As much as this thesis would prefer not to perpetuate the categorisation of people into races, not recognising the injustice against people of colour in a highly racialised, post-colonial, post-apartheid city like Cape Town, seems an even worse violence. In apartheid, people were classified as either white, black or African, Coloured⁶⁸ or Asian. A hope for the future is that race will no longer be a base for inequality, but rather justice and equity.

62

The Group Areas Act was a series of three laws passed by the South African Parliament during apartheid. These laws segregated residential and business areas in urban regions based on racial classifications, establishing a framework for urban apartheid and leading to the forced removal of people of colour from their homes to less developed, overcrowded areas, in the case of Cape Town the main area designated to them being the Cape Flats. Despite people of colour vastly outnumbering the white minority, they were allocated disproportionately smaller living spaces. To complete the segregation policy, pass laws mandated that people of colour who

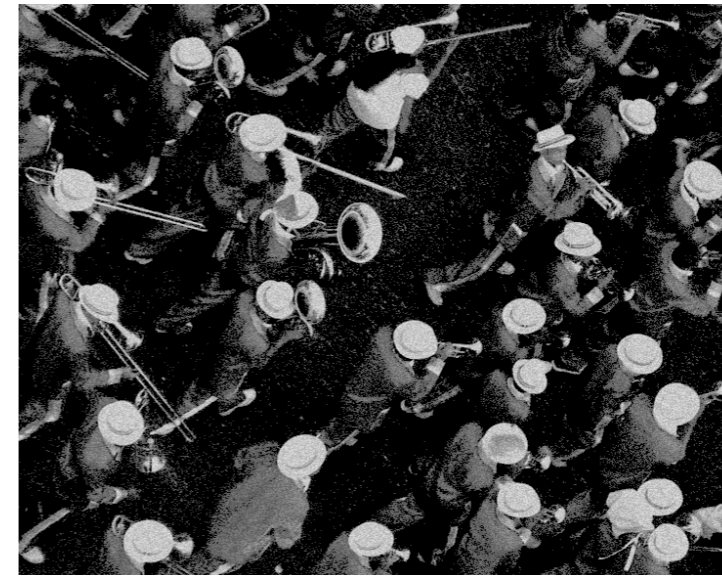


Figure 1.14: The *Kaapse Klopse*

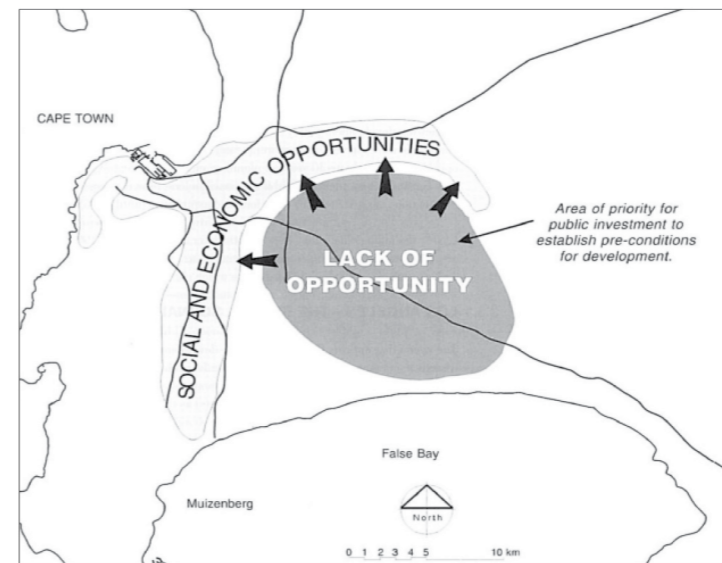


Figure 1.15: Map presented by a City of Cape Town city planner to the post-Apartheid government in 1993

entered the "white" inner city, carry passbooks affording them entry.

63

van Turok, Leanne Seeliger, and Justin Visagie, "Restoring the Core? Central City Decline and Transformation in the South," *Progress in Planning* 144 (February 2021): 100434.

64

Statistics South Africa, "Inequality Trends in South Africa: A Multidimensional Diagnostic of Inequality Report No. 03-10-19" (Pretoria: Statistics SA, 2019).

65

Ivan Turok, Justin Visagie, and Andreas Scheb, "Social Inequality and Spatial Segregation in Cape Town," in *Urban Socio-Economic Segregation and Income Inequality. The Urban Book Series*, ed. Maarten

van Ham et al. (Cham: Springer, 2021), 76.

66

City of Cape Town, "Metropolitan Spatial Development Framework (GTAC)(2016) Programmatic and Costing Comparison of the Housing Programmes." (Pretoria: National Treasury, 2018).

67

Ibid.

68

Ivan Turok, "South Africa's New Urban Agenda: Transformation of Compensation?," *Local Econ* 31, no. 1 (2016): 9-27

69

Government Technical Advisory Centre, "Annual Report 2015/2016" (National Treasury Republic of South Africa, 2016).

good. However, while it improved conditions for many by offering privacy, shelter, and basic services, most housing projects were still built on the already densely populated urban periphery of the Cape Flats. These locations place owners even further away from jobs, quality schools and infrastructure, seeing to it that they often spend up to forty percent of their disposable income on commuting, which in turn deepens government dependency and limits upward mobility, a challenge more acute in Cape Town than any other city in South Africa.⁶⁷ Furthermore, constraints like an eight-year prohibition on selling homes and delays in issuing title deeds trap many households in these peripheral areas. Despite available public land closer to the city's core such as Zonnebloem (previously District Six), Ysterplaat, Wingfield, Youngsfield, and Denel, there has been little political will to develop these strategic sites for affordable housing, leading to civic activists increasingly protesting this government inaction, targeting empty buildings, golf courses, and unused land to advocate for equitable housing development.⁶⁸ In 2016 a National Treasury review underscored the shortcomings of current housing policies and stated that they reinforce apartheid-era spatial legacies, relegating the poor to economically marginal areas.⁶⁹

Next page:
Figure 1.16: Map of the Flats presenting inequality and barriers to growth

Barriers to Growth

Legend

Zoning

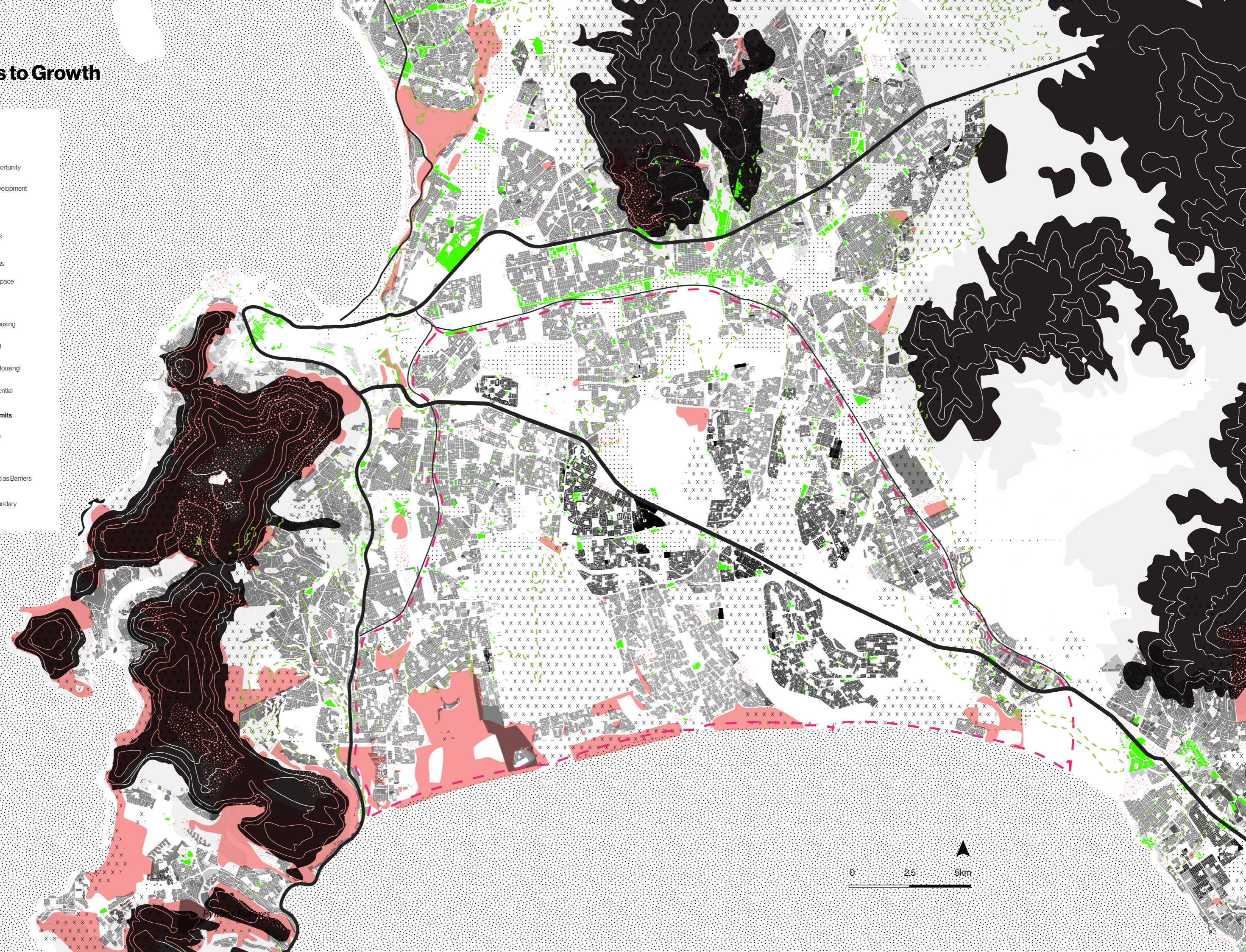
- Economic Opportunity
- Mixed-Use Development
- Agriculture
- Industrial Areas
- Protected Areas
- Public Green Space

Residential Zoning

- Incremental Housing
- Group Housing
- Conventional Housing
- General Residential

Geographies and Limits

- Atlantic Ocean
- Mountains
- Highways used as Barriers
- Cape Flats Boundary



Entrenching division

Wealth is heavily concentrated in Cape Town's core, which serves as an economic, cultural, and tourist hub. However, the commercial success of the CBD has driven up property prices and spurred gentrification in nearby working-class neighborhoods, displacing poorer households. The lack of affordable housing compels clerical and hospitality workers, shop assistants, security staff, and cleaners to endure long commutes from the peripheral Flats. During the last decade, with an increased migration to the city from rural areas and other Southern African countries, the city's unequal settlement pattern continues to be reinforced as there is a steep property price gradient towards the urban core that contributes to the lack of integration into the inner city. Migrants who move to the city, typically can't afford to move into accommodation in the inner city, leaving them to also settle in the already densely populated Flats, where they find work in the informal sector or join the throngs of people on the long daily commute to the CBD.

While the mechanisms of inequality have changed the city remains spatially and economically divided⁷⁰. The unique topography, and its status as a biodiversity hotspot has also led to specific configurations of segregation and access to housing in the city. Nature reserves, intended to inhibit building, cover more than forty percent of the city's footprint. However, these reserves are highly concentrated along the mountain and coastline, coinciding with the affluent and historical "whites only areas". The mountain also shaped the road and rail network, which in turn guided property investment and effectively created physical barriers between apartheid's racial segregated neighbourhoods and today's socio-economically separated suburbs. Thus, the geography of the city reinforces social divides, leading to neighbourhoods of the Cape Flats remaining distinct from the Southern Suburbs and the historical city centre, where the patterns of affluence have remained largely unchanged.⁷¹

Class-apartheid, the new regime?

National legislation under apartheid led to an economy, society and built environment that disadvantaged people of colour, resulting in race becoming synonymous with socio-economic status.⁷² In Cape Town, social class continues to be intertwined with race, even if the relationship is less direct than it used to be.⁷³ The impact of the Group Areas Act was compounded by the creation of separate authorities, schools, healthcare and public transport services for different racial groups. Resources were redistributed to advantage white communities and deepened racial segregation. In example, the education system for white students was far superior to that of people of colour, with the aim of creating intellectual as well as physical segregation and leaving lasting effects on contemporary society's ability to overcome racial inequality.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the consequences of a city planned around disadvantaging the racially other, perpetuated by the spatialised strategies that are yet to be solved, has taken its toll on the previously disadvantaged and in all current socio-economic indexes white inhabitants are still statistically better off than people of colour.

In the UN's South Africa National Human Development Report for 2022 it was found that unemployment in South Africa disproportionately impacts people of colour and women. In the third quarter of 2021, the unemployment rate among black residents was thirty nine percent, nine percent higher than that of coloured people and thirty percent higher than that of white South Africans. The unemployment rate under females stood at thirty-seven percent, four percent higher than men's. Regardless of how unemployment is defined, the rate for people of colour is four times higher than that of white residents.⁷⁵ The lack of opportunity of communities to overcome the mechanisms of segregation left by apartheid planning has left the city still heavily divided along racial lines. In areas previously classified as black, no change in the racial makeup has occurred since 1991. Previous coloured⁷⁶ areas have seen a five percent decrease in those identifying

70
United Nations Development Programme in collaboration with the Government of South Africa, "South Africa National Human Development Report 2022" (Pretoria: UNDP, 2023), <https://www.undp.org/south-africa/publications/south-africa-national-human-development-report-2022>.

71
Ivan Turok, Justin Visagie, and Andreas Scheb, "Social Inequality and Spatial Segregation in Cape Town," in *Urban Socio-Economic Segregation and Income Inequality: The Urban Book Series*, ed. Maarten van Ham et al. (Cham: Springer, 2021), 88.

72
Ibid., 72.

73
Ibid.

74
Alan Mabin, "Suburbanisation, Segregation, and Government of Territorial Transformations," *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa* 57, no. 1 (2005): 41–63.

75
United Nations Development Programme in collaboration with the Government of South Africa, "South Africa National Human Development Report 2022" (Pretoria: UNDP, 2023), <https://www.undp.org/south-africa/publications/south-africa-national-human-development-report-2022>.

76
Historically "coloured" was used under apartheid to classify the mixed-race people that were creole descendants of the Khoi, San, Europeans, and enslaved peoples, from Malaysia, West Africa and Madagascar. Under apartheid, coloureds were granted an ambiguous, marginal status, viewed as "non-white" but also "non-African" due to their perceived Europeanised culture and language. While the official structures of racial categorisation have been dismantled, the term persists in statistics and public discourse, particularly on the Cape Flats, where areas are still identified as coloured by residents. Debates within the coloured community reflect tensions between rejecting the label as a relic of racist history and re-taking it and celebrating a distinct cultural identity. After some reading and much discussion with friends who are members of the community, the latter option was proposed for this thesis. For further insight see: Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough* (Ohio University Press, 2005), and *Ibid.*, *Burdened by Race: Coloured Identities in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Uct Press, 2009).

77
Patrick Bond, "South Africa Tackles Global Apartheid: Is the Reform Strategy Working?" *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103, no. 4 (2004): 817–39.

as coloured, from ninety five percent to eighty five percent and an increase in black residents from five percent to fifteen percent. The largest change in the community make-up of areas post-apartheid is in the areas previously classified as "whites-only space" where the white population declined from eighty-five percent to sixty percent with an increase in coloured residents from twelve to twenty-five percent, and black residents from zero to fifteen percent which is still a significantly small change. Over the past half century, poor planning, a lack of funding for public transit, low density urban sprawl at the periphery and lack of formal job opportunities outside of the urban core has led to a highly unequal city. Political ecologist Patrick Bond's assertion that race based apartheid has been replaced by a class-apartheid seems to be both empirically substantiated and politically unsettling.⁷⁷

Grounded Futures: Acknowledging the Frictions on Site

The Cape Flats embodies a deeply precarious territory, shaped by historical and ongoing processes of exclusion and alienation that have impacted both people and plants. As a space where ecological fragility mirrors socio-political marginalization, it reveals the entrenched inequalities that persist within Cape Town's urban fabric. By identifying these conditions, this chapter seeks to situate the reader within a contested landscape where friction in and between human and more-than-human realms is ever present. However, this is not a narrative of inevitable decline. Rather, it is a call to recognize the hidden potentials embedded in these precarious realities, the fragments of life, culture, and ecology that remain. In envisioning speculative futures for the Cape Flats, this thesis asks: How do we move beyond exclusion and alienation toward new forms of entangled belonging? How can we contest the marginalization of both the Flats fynbos and its human communities, and imagine a future where these relationships are repaired and reimagined? This requires engaging with the non-human world not as a backdrop to human life, but as an active agent

in shaping urban possibilities.

This chapter has sought to set the scene for these explorations, inviting the reader to consider how speculative narratives rooted in the realities of this territory might propose alternative ways of being and dwelling, ways that are more attuned to the precarious ecologies of both human and more-than-human life. By doing so, this thesis moves toward a vision of the city that embraces the entanglements of people and plants, rejecting exclusionary urban paradigms in favour of more inclusive futures. It asks how we might design with and learn from the more-than-human, not as an abstract ideal, but as a grounded response to the layered histories and complex realities of the Cape Flats. What forms of life and habitation can emerge when we take non-human teachings seriously? This is the critical question that the chapters to come will explore.

02



A Framework for the Future

Cyanotype print of
Fynbos stems. Made by
author and Fynbos

A Framework for the Future

Chapter Two provides the conceptual tools with which to navigate this thesis aiming to establish a framework that responds directly to the challenges introduced in the previous chapter. While chapter one explored the socio-ecological entanglements of the city, this section offers the theoretical underpinnings that enable a reimagining of multispecies coexistence in this post-colonial, post-natural landscape.

The chapter consists of theoretical foundations alongside a conceptual glossary that draws from collaborative online repositories such as the *Cyberfeminist Index*¹ (Figure 2.1-2.2) and the xenofeminist collective Laboria Cuboniks's website² (Figure 2.3). These references provide tools for dismantling dominant epistemologies, which have historically shaped conservation policies in the Cape Flats, reinforcing nature/culture binaries and excluding alternative knowledge systems. In this chapter, the reader also receives their first glimpse of the contents of the fictional manuscript of the novel, *Fynbos Futures*, imagined as a part of the project of this thesis. Appendix A, containing "the Afro-Xenofeminist Manifesto for Cape Town", is presented as the translation of theory into actionable principles with which to imagine an alternative future for the Cape Flats, and serves to bridge the gap between real and fictional.

A key intervention of this framework is its capacity to speculate on a future where entrenched binaries are dissolved, the hybridity of life is embraced, and alienation, as understood through xenofeminist theory, is

¹ Mindy Seu, "Cyberfeminist Index," *cyberfeminismindex.com* (Rhizome, 2020), <https://cyberfeminismindex.com/>.
² Laboria Cuboniks, n.d., <https://laboriacuboniks.net/>.



Figure 2.1: The Cyberfeminist Index created by Mindy Seu and commissioned by Rhizome. (Accessed 18 January 2025)

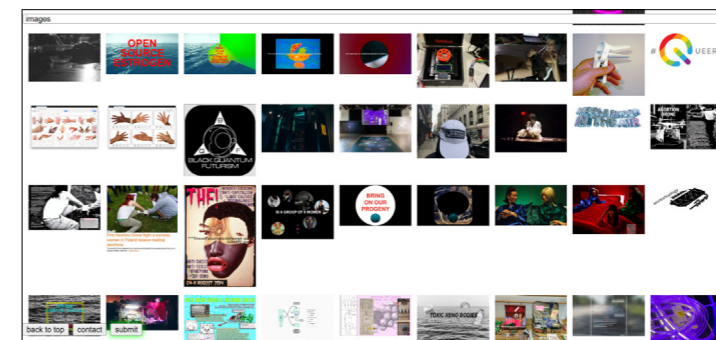


Figure 2.2: The Cyberfeminist Index created by Mindy Seu and commissioned by Rhizome. (Accessed 18 January 2025)

XF Manifesto		Texts & Interviews		Books
Concepts	Resources / Critique	Overflow	Search	
Filtre				
Year	Title	Author	Publisher	Lang
2020	On Xeno-Solidarity and the Collective Struggle for Free Time Interviewer: Sasha Shestakova, Anna Engelhardt	Helen Hester	Strelka Magazine	EN
2020	XF Seminar Postmortem	Lucca Fraser	Self Published	EN
2019	제노페미니즘의 새로운 경로 라보리아 큐보닉스 인터뷰 Interviewer: Agrafa Society	Laboria Cuboniks	Zineseminar, Vol. 1	KO
2019	New Vectors from Xenofeminism Interviewer: Agrafa Society	Laboria Cuboniks	Zineseminar, Vol. 1	EN

Figure 2.3: The Xenofeminist Manifesto website created by Laboria Cuboniks. (Accessed 18 January 2025)

harnessed as a political strategy rooted in the relational philosophy of *Ubuntu*. In the context of the Cape Flats, where the degradation of the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos and the Social inequalities of the Cape Flats are deeply entangled, this framework provides a necessary departure from dominant paradigms that have treated fynbos as an inert object rather than a dynamic participant in the urban fabric. By dissolving dualisms, embracing the post-natural condition, and leveraging alienation as a mechanism for change, this framework envisions the Cape Flats as a complex, relational space where plants, people, and technology co-create new ways of being and organizing on a damaged planet.

To further support this framework, the *Archive of Otherwise* presents concepts, theories, critiques, and provocations as a network of ideas, allowing the reader to engage with them non-linearly. This glossary offers a vocabulary for rethinking entangled human and more-than-human relationships within the Cape Flats, acknowledging the ways in which fynbos, as both an ecological and political entity, has been shaped by colonial conservation strategies and urban marginalisation. Rather than presenting a fixed lexicon, the archive is a series of fragments, provocations, and prompts for thinking otherwise. Readers are encouraged to use it as a guide for imagining new entanglements between plants, people, and technologies in the Cape Flats, revisiting it in moments of confusion, inspiration, or alienation.

The Post Natural Primer: Strategies for thinking Otherwise

This section is presented as a conceptual primer for the actionable principles to come. Here, the reader is introduced to the alienating practice of modernity, rooted in dualistic thinking and enforced by capitalistic, patriarchal and neo-colonial ideologies. Following from this, critiques, and concepts following **post-human**⁽ⁱ⁾, new-materialist and post-natural trajectories, will be presented as ways to think otherwise in order challenge the current paradigm.

The current socio-ecological condition in which we find ourselves is deeply intertwined with the dualistic frameworks of Western thought that underpin the colonial, patriarchal and capitalist systems that have shaped modernity. By artificially separating man, or Western man, from all other forms of life, marginalised peoples and more-than-humans have historically been excluded from dominant narratives and framed as “**other**⁽ⁱⁱ⁾”, perpetuating ecological and social injustices.³ This process of exclusion resulted in widespread alienation, a disconnection from the land, from the environment, and from each other. As theorised by Consigliere and discussed in the introduction of this thesis⁴, this **alienation**⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾ fosters a sense of apocalyptic inevitability, transforming climate and socio-political crises into the perceived collapse of all worlds, with no room to conceive of other potential futures. It is precisely against this nihilistic worldview of inevitable collapse that this thesis positions itself. By challenging these dualisms, we seek to foster an understanding that transcends

the divides between nature/culture, human/non-human and natural/artificial to create new pathways for **coexistence**^(iv).⁵ Thus, our crisis today is not only ecological but also deeply cultural, epistemological and ethical and the development of new ways to conceptualise the world is necessary.

These “conceptual battles”, as framed by artist and writer Patricia Reed, are, at their core, political struggles that shape how we think about identity, belonging, and coexistence. They take time, but real, lasting change starts with small steps at the level of ideas.⁶ It requires questioning what we take for granted, challenging fixed notions of who we are, what “we” means, and how we relate to the world. This process opens up a gap between the world as it is and the world as it could be, encouraging us to rethink what is possible, or to think otherwise. Returning to Consigliere, the practice of imagining otherwise involves foregrounding “other worlds - fragile, imperfect, and far from idyllic, but undoubtedly other.”⁷ This approach suggests a form of ecological thinking that seeks to transform the meaning and production of knowledge by striving for alternative ways of life and experience within existing **relational**^(v) frameworks.⁸ Changing the way we see the world also changes us. Concepts shape our understanding of reality, and in turn, the realities we create reshape our concepts. This mutual influence, between ideas and their real-world effects, is a continuous feedback loop. But because the outcomes of our actions are never fully

³ The literature that substantiates this argument is immense. See for example: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014); Eduardo Viveiros, *Cannibal Metaphysics*. (University of Minnesota Press, 2017) and Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2016).

⁴ See Part 00: Introduction, 5

⁵ Stefania Consigliere, *Fables of Re-Enchantment. Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*, trans. Steven Colatrella (2020; repr., New York: Minor Compositions, 2024), 13-15.

⁶ Patricia Reed, “Xenophily and Computational Denaturalization,” *E-Flux Architecture*, September 2017, 7

⁷ Stefania Consigliere, *Fables of Re-Enchantment. Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*, trans. Steven Colatrella (2020; repr., New York: Minor Compositions, 2024), 119.

⁸ Camillo Boano and Richard Lee Peragine, “A Pedagogy of Uselessness: Challenging Solutionism and Utility in the Anthropocene through Architectural Pedagogy,” *The Journal of Architecture*, August 7, 2024, 17.

⁹ Patricia Reed, “Xenophily and Computational Denaturalization,” *E-Flux Architecture*, September 2017, 10

¹⁰ Specifically, attention will be paid to Latour’s engagement with the *Gaia Hypothesis* and his actor network theory; see for example: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), Descola’s



Figure 2.4: Cover image for, Stefania Consigliere's *Fables of Re-Enchantment. Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution* titled *Collage of Sea Leaves* by Nicolo James Fumarola, 2020

predictable, we must stay open to adjusting our ideas. If we cling too tightly to any single perspective, we risk turning flexible ideas into rigid “truths” that limit our understanding. It’s like looking at an object from one angle and assuming that view captures its entire form, ignoring the complexity hidden from sight. The key is to recognize that our views are always incomplete and fallible. Only by accepting this can we keep our thinking dynamic and open to new possibilities, preventing ideas from hardening into fixed, unquestioned assumptions about how things must be.⁹ Following this premise, the text will present concepts and theories that have shaped our current condition, and present critiques of these concepts by thinkers such as Bruno Latour, Philippe Descola and Donna Haraway¹⁰, in order to start re-framing the ideas around the post-natural condition through which we can speculate on the future.

work on relational ontologies outside the Western culture, see: Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), and Haraway’s concepts of *natureculture*, situated knowledge and *becoming-with*, see for example: Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016).

¹¹ See for example: Jason W Moore, *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Verso, 2015); Jason W Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: Pm Press, 2016); and Elizabeth A Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

¹² Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation—an Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

Dissolving Dualisms

The multiple crisis we face, socially, economically, ecologically (which are impossible to disentangle) did not appear in a vacuum, but are the results of historically entrenched systems of domination and exploitation. Their most acute consequences follow well-trodden paths of colonialism, patriarchy, capitalism, and racialized inequality, disproportionately affecting those already marginalised by these structures of power.¹¹ As Sylvia Wynter argues, this uneven making of the modern world is rooted in the construction of “Man” as a universal subject, a construct that systematically excluded non-European peoples and the more-than-human world from full humanity, reducing them to objects of labour, exploitation, and control.¹² The re-assessment of our conceptual framework for **worlding**^(vi) starts from a critical engagement with the traditional Western concepts of nature, that have long allowed exploitation, domination and destruction.

Scholars across feminist, post-humanist, and new materialist traditions, along with those in other fields, agree that Western epistemology and ontology are built on systems of exclusion that

ARCHIVE OF OTHERWISE

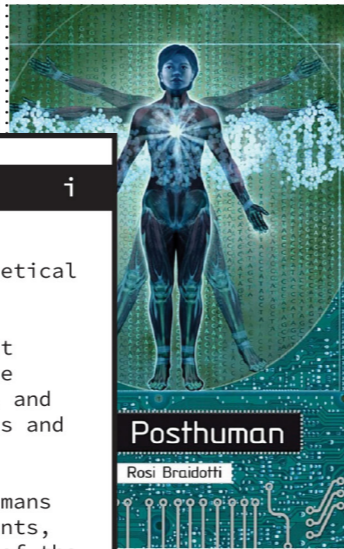
- A
- Agency
- Alien
- Alienationⁱⁱⁱ**
- Anti-naturalism
- Assemblage
- B**
- Becoming-with
- Belonging
- C**
- Coexistence^{iv}**
- Cyberfeminism
- D**
- Decolonising
- E**
- Entangled
- F**
- Fiction-Friction
- G**
- Gaia
- H**
- Hybrid
- I**
- Imaginaries
- Infrastructures
- Intersectionality
- J**
- K**
- L**
- M**
- More-than-human: Agency
- N**
- New-Materialism
- O**
- Otherⁱ**
- Otherwise
- P**
- Post-colonial
- Post-Humanⁱ**
- Post-natural
- Q**
- R**
- Relationality^v**
- Response-ability
- S**
- T**
- Technomaterialism
- Tentacular
- U**
- Ubuntu
- V**
- W**
- X**
- Xeno
- Xenofeminism
- Y**
- Z**

"WHAT IS POST-HUMANISM"- Carry Wolfe

Post-Human NEW ENTRY #333 i

DEF:: Post-humanism is a broad philosophical and theoretical framework that critiques and moves beyond human exceptionalism (the idea that humans are the central, superior agents of meaning and agency in the world). It challenges the humanist tradition that emerged from the Enlightenment, which emphasized rationality, autonomy, and individualism, often at the expense of more-than-humans and ecological systems.

Post-humanism proposes relational ontologies, where humans exist in dynamic, entangled networks with animals, plants, technologies, and environments. It is deeply critical of the anthropocentric hierarchies that underpin colonialism, capitalism, and scientific rationalism, offering alternative ways of conceptualizing agency, ethics, and subjectivity.



Worlding NEW ENTRY #41

Def:: Worlding is a generative process which beings-human and more-than-human transform, and inhabit worlds. Worlding acknowledges the contested worlds of humanist conceptualizations of the world and entanglements.

Other NEW ENTRY #222 ii

Understanding this process of othering as the product of dualism and practices of "backgrounding" is essential to dismantling hierarchies that sustain colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist systems. These systems have long constructed the other as that which must be controlled, subdued, or erased, whether through the exploitation of Indigenous lands, the subjugation of women, or the erasure of more-than-human agency. Othering operates through dualisms, creating distinctions that justify exclusion and oppression. The rational human being, according to this logic, is characterized by a negation of the other

Other

Provocation, see:

2025 - A Lexicon for Bridging Decolonial Queer Feminisms and Materialist Feminisms_Beyond Binaries_De-Othering - Kerby Lynch

The Relational Ubuntu Philosophy - I AM BECAUSE WE ARE.

"I am a compostist, not a posthumanist: we are all compost, not post-human."- Haraway

Relationality NEW ENTRY #390 v

A shift from identity to interaction, from autonomy to interdependence.

Relationality NEW ENTRY #52

Rather than viewing entities - plants, people, technologies - as isolated objects, relationality foregrounds their **dynamic, co-constitutive interactions.**



2019 - Essay

Alienation, Freedom and the Synthetic

Diann Bauer

Alienation, Syn

How to live at the intersection of economics and immediate experience have led to the emergence of these capacities with an awareness that is greater than...

Alienation NEW ENTRY #4 iii

0x01

XF seizes **alienation** as an impetus to generate new worlds. We are all alienated - but have we ever been otherwise? It is through, and not despite, our alienated condition that we can free ourselves from the muck of immediacy. - The Xenofeminist Manifesto

Coexistence NEW ENTRY #3

coexistence is not a neutral or harmonious state but a negotiation of entanglement, friction, and adaptation between human and more-than-human beings...

Coexistence NEW ENTRY #56 iv

THE FERAL ATLAS

<https://feralatlas.supdigital.org/>

Coexistence NEW ENTRY #18 iv

See:

2016 - *Dark Ecology, For a Logic of Future Coexistence* - Timothy Morton

2016 - *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* - Donna Haraway

Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think* (2013)



Drawing from xenofeminism, alienation is repurposed as a tool for transformation rather than a state of despair. Instead of seeking a return to an imagined organic unity with nature, xenofeminism embraces alienation to dismantle oppressive structures—be they patriarchal, colonial, or ecological.

create hierarchies of dominance and subjugation, leading to exploitation and depletion.¹³ These patterns of oppression and inequality stem from a binary way of thinking that shapes the core assumptions and narratives of Western philosophy. At the heart of this historical trajectory lies the conceptual separation of man from the world he inhabits, a rupture rooted in Western metaphysical traditions that frame nature as inert and exploitable.¹⁴ This separation is philosophically grounded in Cartesian dualism, which provided the intellectual foundation for modern Western thought. In the seventeenth century, René Descartes articulated this distinction in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, a pivotal text that shaped Western metaphysics. Descartes proposed that reality is divided into two fundamental substances: *res cogitans*, the thinking mind or soul, and *res extensa*, the extended body or material world.¹⁵ This dualism fundamentally redefined humanity's relationship to the world. By privileging mind over matter, Descartes framed the material world, including animals, plants, and landscapes, as passive and inert, and thus, subject to human control and manipulation.¹⁶ The mind, as the seat of reason, was seen as separate from and superior to the body, a distinction that not only justified the domination of nature but also laid the groundwork for a hierarchy of beings.¹⁷ This logic positioned certain humans, namely white, Western, males as the epitome of thinking beings, while women, Indigenous peoples, non-Europeans, and the more-than-human world were relegated to the realm of non-thinking bodies, to be used, exploited, or tamed.

The critique of dualistic thinking is longstanding, with scholars across disciplines challenging its role in structuring Western epistemologies¹⁸. As Consigliere argues, the dualistic thinking that characterise the “epistemic and concrete violence of colonial modernity”

is constructed around irreconcilable opposites, nature/culture, human/non-human, male/female, natural/artificial, citizen/foreigner, urban/rural, which create a smooth, uniform whole without interruptions. This framework abolishes discontinuity, qualitative variations, thresholds, and mutations, reducing the knowable world to what is measurable, quantifiable, calculable, and flat.¹⁹ Such dualistic thinking has long underpinned systems of domination, privileging one side of the binary while marginalising the other. Nature has been subjugated to culture, women to men, the colonized to the colonizer, and non-human life to human life. These hierarchical structures have justified exploitation, exclusion, and violence, entrenching systems of oppression that persist today.²⁰

On othering

The *Other* refers to those perceived as fundamentally different or **alien**^(vii), often constructed in opposition to the self or dominant group. Rooted in Hegelian philosophy²¹ and further developed by thinkers like Emmanuel Levinas, Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon²², the concept underpins the process of *othering*, the act of defining and marginalizing individuals or groups as outsiders. In postcolonial theory, Edward Said applied the concept to the construction of non-European peoples as *Others* in colonial discourse, a process he termed *Orientalism*. Othering enforces social hierarchies by marking certain beings as inferior, rendering them politically, socially, and culturally subordinate.²³ In post-natural theory, othering has been expanded to include the marginalization of non-human entities, like plants, which are positioned as passive or outside the sphere of political **agency**^(viii).²⁴

The dichotomy central to Western thought functions by positioning one side of the distinction as active and superior

13 See for example: Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); Karen Barad, “Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart,” *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 168–87; Elizabeth A. St. Pierre, Alecia Y. Jackson, and Lisa A. Mazzei, “New Empiricisms and New Materialisms,” *Cultural Studies & Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 2 (March 21, 2016): 99–110.

14 See: Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993) and Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature* (New York: HarperOne, 2019).

15 Descartes presents his dualism in René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 1641), especially in the Second and Sixth Meditations.

16 See: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity press, 2013).

17 Sylvia Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, after Man, Its Overrepresentation-an Argument,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 265

18 See for example: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Victoria, British Columbia: Camas Books, 1985) and Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

19 Stefania Consigliere, *Fables of Re-Enchantment. Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*, trans. Steven Colatrella (2020; repr., New York: Minor Compositions, 2024), 18.

20 See: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

21 The concept of the *Other* is rooted in Hegel's dialectic of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807). Hegel posits that self-consciousness emerges through a process of recognising another consciousness—the *Other*.

22 See: Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Duquesne University Press (Duquesne University Press, 1969); and Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989); and



Figure 2.5: Artwork titled: *Beyond Binaries*, by Aude About Nasr for the article: *A Lexicon for Bridging Decolonial Queer Feminisms and Materialist Feminisms*

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

23 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross Macdonald School, Resource Services Library, 1978).

24 Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

25 The subaltern refers to marginalized groups excluded from dominant power structures, a concept developed by Antonio Gramsci and expanded by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Spivak argues that the subaltern's voice is often silenced by hegemonic systems of knowledge. While traditionally applied to human subjects, the term can also be extended to non-human entities, such as plants, which are similarly marginalised in political and ecological narratives. See: Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* (1929; repr., New York; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1971); Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) and Joyce E. Chaplin, “Can the Nonhuman Speak?: Breaking the Chain of Being in the Anthropocene,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 78, no. 4 (2017): 509–29.

26 Anti-essentialist ecofeminism rejects the notion of an inherent link between women and nature, viewing it as a socially constructed tool that reinforces gender stereotypes. Instead, it focuses on how social and cultural structures shape both gender oppression

subject, while the other is framed against this superior subject as passive and inferior. The inferior side, be it nature, women, or the subaltern²⁵, exists to be used and appropriated by the superior, rational subject, who claims this right through their presumed intellectual and moral dominance within this dualistic framework. This is demonstrated in feminist philosopher Val Plumwood's

and environmental exploitation, emphasizing relationality and interconnectedness. Thinkers such as Val Plumwood, see: Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); and Stacy Alaimo, see: Stacy Alaimo, *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010) advocate for an ethics of care that resists both patriarchy and ecological domination without reducing identities to fixed traits.

27 Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 21.

28 *Ibid.*, 4.

29 *Terra nullius* is a Latin phrase that means “nobody's land” or “land belonging to no one”. It was used as a legal principle in European law from the 18th century to justify the acquisition of land by European empires in the Americas, Africa, and Oceania.

elaboration on an anti-essentialist ecofeminism²⁶, where she contends that women and nature are similarly framed as passive within dominant structures. Nature, according to binarian thought is a passive resource, waiting to be exploited, dominated, conserved and appropriated through culture and technology. Similarly, females are treated as passive, through what Plumwood calls “backgrounding”, where female activities are understood as taking place in the background.²⁷ Naturalisation plays a major role in this devaluing of both nature and the female:

“To be defined as ‘nature’ [...] is to be defined as passive, as non-agent and non-subject, as the “environment” or invisible background conditions against which the “foreground” achievements of reason or culture (provided typically by the white, western, male expert or entrepreneur) take place.”²⁸

Thus, those on the wrong side of the dualistic divide are understood as *terra nullius*²⁹, a resource devoid of its own inherent purposes or meanings, rendered available for appropriation and shaped to serve the aims of those who claim to embody reason or intellect. A supposedly superior culture, framed as rational and creative, is juxtaposed with nature, which is perceived as lacking agency, history, and intrinsic value.

To be labelled *terra nullius* is to be rendered void of cultural significance,

autonomy, or inherent worth. This process is deeply rooted in colonial logics, and was used to justify the domination, exploitation and subjugation of so-called 'untouched' landscapes, 'uncivilized' peoples, or 'savage' bodies. Nature (often feminised) is either subjected to appropriation as an object of exploitation or regulated to fit colonial frameworks.³⁰ Nature (often feminised) is either subjected to appropriation as an object of exploitation or regulated to fit colonial frameworks.³¹ The resulting land-conquest and resource depletion has left the twenty first century in ecological crisis. As cultural critic T. J Demos states, more than understanding the entanglement of human and environment we need to understand and investigate the consequences of the colonial dynamics of our recent past.³² Recognising these dynamics within Western ideology is impertinent in understanding on what ideological foundations the post-colonial territory of Cape Town was created, in order to move past these dynamics to imagine an alternative way of being and organising in the post-colonial city. Rejecting these binary concepts of Western ideology, Nature/Culture, Male/Female, Human/More-than-human, is a necessary act of defiance and resistance within this context.

Understanding this process of othering as the product of dualism and practices of "backgrounding"³³ is essential to dismantling hierarchies that sustain colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist systems.³⁴ These systems have long constructed the other as that which must be controlled, subdued, or erased, whether through the exploitation of Indigenous lands, the subjugation of women, or the erasure of more-than-human agency.³⁵ Othering operates through dualisms, creating distinctions that justify exclusion and oppression. The rational human being, according to this logic, is characterized by a negation of

the other.³⁶ In this pursuit of domination and exclusion, the human being destroys himself and the planet, clinging to narcissistic systems of classification. As long as humanity understands itself as separate and discrete, it remains trapped in a history of dissatisfaction and violence.

In South Africa, the concepts of othering and subalternity take on profound significance within the context of apartheid and colonialism. The apartheid regime systematically marginalized Black South Africans, relegating them to subaltern status through racial, ethnic, and cultural othering. The denial of basic human rights and the imposition of racial hierarchies exemplify the politics of othering at a societal scale. Post-apartheid efforts to address these injustices include initiatives like land reform and the recognition of Indigenous ecological knowledge. These efforts aim to bring subaltern voices and knowledge systems into mainstream discourse, challenging the colonial legacy.

Apartheid also shaped the othering of nature. Conservation policies rooted in colonial ideals framed natural landscapes as spaces to be preserved for settler recreation, often excluding Indigenous communities from their ancestral lands. Alien vegetation clearing projects, such as the Working for Water program, continue to frame certain plant species as "invaders" to be eradicated, mirroring the language of human exclusion during apartheid. These ecological interventions risk perpetuating colonial logics if they fail to account for the socio-political entanglements of landscapes.³⁷ Addressing the othering of nature in post-apartheid South Africa requires integrating more-than-human agency into the discourse of reconciliation. By acknowledging the political dimensions of nature and fostering relational ways of being with the environment, South Africa can move beyond the binaries of colonialism and apartheid toward a more

30
Suzana Sawyer and Arun Agrawal, "Environmental Orientalisms," *Cultural Critique*, no. 45 (2000): 79-80.

31
Ibid.

32
T. J Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016).

33
Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993), 21.

34
See: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross Macdonald School, Resource Services Library, 1978).

35
Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).

36
Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity press, 2013).

37
These points will be thoroughly investigated in the next chapter, Part 03.

38
Bruno Latour and Nikolaj Schultz, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class* (John Wiley & Sons, 2022), 10.



Figure 2.6: Artwork titled: *Fragments of Beautiful Life*, by my mother, Nicolette Geldenhuys. This work is an assemblage of life, made by collaging fragments from prints she made of elements collected from her home in Cape Town

inclusive, post-natural framework that recognizes the mutual entanglement of people, plants, and places in shaping just futures.

39
Ethico-onto-political refers to an approach that simultaneously considers ethics (how we should act), ontology (what kinds of beings and relations exist), and politics (how power is structured and contested). It emphasizes that knowledge production, modes of existence, and political struggles are deeply entangled rather than separate domains.

40
Laura A. Meek and Julia Alejandra Morales Fontanilla, "Otherwise," *Feminist Anthropology* 3 (June 4, 2022).

41
Ibid., 274.

42
Ibid., 278.

Strategies for Thinking Otherwise

To move away from exclusionary and exploitative systems, we need alternative ways of being and organising for a just future. The dissolution of these dualisms is not simply an academic exercise, it is a necessary shift in how we perceive and interact with the world, with major implications for addressing social, ecological, and political injustice.

Bruno Latour and Nikolai Schultz argue that confronting the current condition requires a fundamental rewriting of history and an ontological reorganisation of ethics and politics, one that fully acknowledges humanity's entanglement with the more-than-human world.³⁸ Similarly, Laura Meek and Julia Alejandra Morales Fontanilla introduce otherwise as a feminist, decolonial method and an *ethico-onto-political*³⁹ commitment to imagining futures beyond the probable.⁴⁰ They define the **otherwise**^(ix) as "the insistence of the possible against the pull of the probable"⁴¹, arguing that it is not just a critique of dominant epistemologies but an active mode of world-making. Thinking otherwise, they suggest, requires breaking with inherited modes of knowledge production that perpetuate colonial hierarchies and disciplinary boundaries.

In their call for an anthropology of otherwise, Meek and Morales Fontanilla emphasize the importance of "epistemic unruliness" and the refusal to treat knowledge as a fixed, hierarchical structure.⁴² Instead of reinforcing dominant categories, such as nature/culture or human/non-human, thinking otherwise means embracing speculative, relational, and fugitive forms of knowledge that allow for new ways of imagining coexistence. As they put it, the otherwise

“potentiates the possible within situated practices and relations”⁴³, offering an approach that does not merely describe worlds but actively intervenes in them.

In the context of the Cape Flats, where conservation, urbanisation, and colonial legacies intersect, *thinking otherwise* means rejecting binary urban models that separate nature from human life. The conservation of Fynbos, has historically been framed as an effort to preserve an unchanging, pristine nature, one that is separate from and often in conflict with the human communities living alongside it. This thesis instead aligns with a framework of otherwise, recognizing Fynbos as not only an ecological entity but also a political subject, one shaped by histories of displacement, exclusion, and marginalisation. A commitment to thinking otherwise in this context means moving beyond separation and toward a relational politics that acknowledges the co-constitutive agency of plants, people, and urban ecologies.

As Meek and Morales Fontanilla argue, “the otherwise is built into every arrangement of existence—to build is to build the building and its noise”.⁴⁴ This suggests that rather than waiting for an entirely new paradigm to emerge, alternative futures must be cultivated from within the cracks of existing structures. By embracing an otherwise approach to conservation and urbanism, this thesis seeks to challenge the probabilistic logic of contemporary environmental governance, one that measures biodiversity through fixed metrics and universalized categories, by instead fostering a space for speculative, situated, and plural ways of knowing and being with the more-than-human world.

Latour, Gaia and the Entangled Nature of Existence

Latour, in his reading of the scientific revolution around *Gaia*, critiques the Cartesian model of space as an empty and stable space waiting only to be filled and used by humans. In contrast, The Gaia hypothesis, proposed by chemist James Lovelock and biologist Lynn Margulis, posits that the Earth is not a passive backdrop for human activity but rather a self-regulating, living system in which organisms actively shape their environments to sustain life.⁴⁵ In this view, space is never empty, but always filled with dynamic, reciprocal interactions between organisms and their surroundings. As Latour explains, this mutual adaptation means that organisms do not merely live in a pre-existing environment, they co-constitute it through their interactions.⁴⁶ This view of landscapes fundamentally disrupts Cartesian notions of fixed, stable territories and instead presents space as a web of entanglements, continuously shaped by human and more-than-human agency.⁴⁷ Latour’s actor-network theory (ANT) builds on this post-binary understanding of space by proposing that reality consists of networks of relations between human and more-than-human actors.⁴⁸ These actors are not isolated entities but are constituted through their interactions, suggesting that landscapes are never purely natural or cultural but are **hybrid** spaces of co-constitution:

43
Laura A. Meek and Julia Alejandra Morales Fontanilla, “Otherwise,” *Feminist Anthropology* 3 (June 4, 2022), 278.
44
Ibid., 279.
45
Bruno Latour and Nikolaj Schultz, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class* (John Wiley & Sons, 2022), 4.
46
Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 67.
47
Ibid., 89.
48
Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 103.

Figure 2.7: Cape Flats Locality Map



Figure 2.7: Image from Hotglue’s *Freakabolic* project, saved under metabolic water/biopunk. Available at: <https://freakabolic.hotglue.me/?mwbiopunk>

“The idea of an environment scarcely makes any sense since you can never draw a boundary line that would distinguish an organism from what surrounds it. (...) And the history of living beings is there to remind us that this Earth that’s so ‘favourable’ to their development has been made favourable by living beings to their designs (...) Blindly, they have bent space around them; they have more or less folded, buried, rolled, balled themselves up in it.”

49

49
Ibid., 106.
50
Bruno Latour and Nikolaj Schultz, *On the Emergence of an Ecological Class* (John Wiley & Sons, 2022), 22.
51
Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climate Regime* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2017), 54.
52
Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), Pg 103.

Here, he rejects the notion of a separate environment that stands apart from human activity. Instead, he suggests that landscapes and territories are shaped into being through the interactions of living beings. This co-constitutive view of space presents a radical alternative to Cartesian spatiality, in which space is not a container but a relational process. Latour’s critique invites us to move beyond dualistic thinking and adopt a more relational ontology, one that recognizes the agency of the more-than-human world and the interconnectedness of all beings.⁵⁰

This shift is particularly urgent in the context of ecological crisis. The Cartesian framework, which reduces nature to a passive object, has contributed to climate change, environmental degradation, and the ongoing exploitation of marginalized communities.⁵¹ Latour’s post-binary approach, by contrast, opens up new possibilities for thinking about landscapes, territories, and politics as spaces of entanglement, where social and ecological concerns are inseparably linked. In this view, landscapes are not fixed, bounded territories but ongoing processes of becoming, shaped by human and more-than-human actors alike. Moving from a Cartesian worldview to a Gaia-inspired one requires a radical rethinking of politics and ethics, where relations take precedence over binaries and landscapes are understood as active, dynamic participants in the creation of life.⁵² This relational perspective offers a path forward, one that embraces complexity, hybridity, and the entangled nature of existence, challenging modern systems of domination and a new framework for imagining alternative futures.

Descola’s Denaturalisation of Naturalism

Building on Latour’s critique of dualisms, Philippe Descola offers a comparative framework for understanding how

different societies relate to the more-than-human world. Both thinkers challenge the Cartesian separation of nature and culture, but Descola's approach is rooted in anthropological inquiry, emphasizing the diversity of ontologies that have shaped human-world relations across cultures. Like Latour, he suggests a shift from the nature/culture binary to a human, more-than-human relationality. He proposes doing this through a "denaturalisation of naturalism."⁵³

In his attempt, he examined how non-Western societies relate to the world and identified four main ontological types: animism, totemism, analogism and naturalism. *Animism*, the first ontology, refers to a worldview in which all beings, human and more-than-human, are endowed with souls or spirits, leading to a continuity between humans and other entities. The next, *totemism*, is a system in which humans and non-humans are grouped into shared categories or clans, emphasizing kinship and relationality. *Analogism* constitutes a worldview that sees the world as composed of discontinuous elements that are connected through correspondences and ritual practices. Lastly, *naturalism*, the dominant Western ontology, separates humans from non-human nature, viewing humans as subjects with culture and non-humans as objects within nature.

The different ontological types identified by Descola demonstrate the historical contingency of Western naturalism and that this dualistic framework is not universal, but rather a culturally specific worldview that has become hegemonic through colonialism, capitalism, and modern science.⁵⁴ Unlike Western philosophy, many indigenous cultures see no clear distinction between human and more-than-human entities, instead viewing all beings as interconnected, in example, in animist ontologies, animals, plants, rivers, and mountains are seen

as sentient beings with whom humans must engage in ethical relations, rather than as resources to be exploited. The denaturalization of naturalism is thus an invitation to rethink Western assumptions about nature, culture, and subjectivity.

A difference in Latour and Descola's theories are in their views on modernity. Latour critiques modernity's claim to separate nature and society, arguing that we have never truly been modern, because hybrid entities have always existed.⁵⁵ Descola, on the other hand, acknowledges the power of naturalism in shaping Western thought, but he suggests that alternative relational ontologies have long existed outside of the Western framework and can inform more just and ethical ways of living today.⁵⁶ Descola's comparative anthropology ultimately reinforces Latour's critique of dualism, but it also offers practical insights into how non-Western ontologies can inform alternative ways of being and organising for alternative futures. It is important to acknowledge these alternative ontologies, and to investigate their potentials for imagining otherwise.

Latour and Descola's critiques of the nature/culture divide offer foundational insights for understanding the complex entanglements between human and more-than-human worlds. By rejecting dualistic frameworks and emphasizing relational ontologies, their work dismantles the illusion of human exceptionalism that has underpinned exploitative systems of thought and governance. Latour's gaia-inspired reimagining of space as an ongoing process of co-constitution and Descola's denaturalization of Western naturalism both underscore the urgency of moving beyond reductionist binaries to embrace hybrid ecologies shaped through reciprocal interactions. These ideas are critical for this thesis as they form the conceptual groundwork for a shift toward post-natural thinking. Latour

53
Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

54
Ibid, 55
Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 43.

56
Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 192.

57
See for example: Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993); Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Victoria, British Columbia: Camas Books, 1985); Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Karen Barad, "Diffracting Diffraction: Cutting Together-Apart," *Parallax* 20, no. 3 (July 3, 2014): 168–87.

58
Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993)

59
R. Nimmo, "Posthumanism," ed. P. Atkinson et al., *SAGE Research Methods Foundations*, January 1, 2020, 196.

60
Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991)

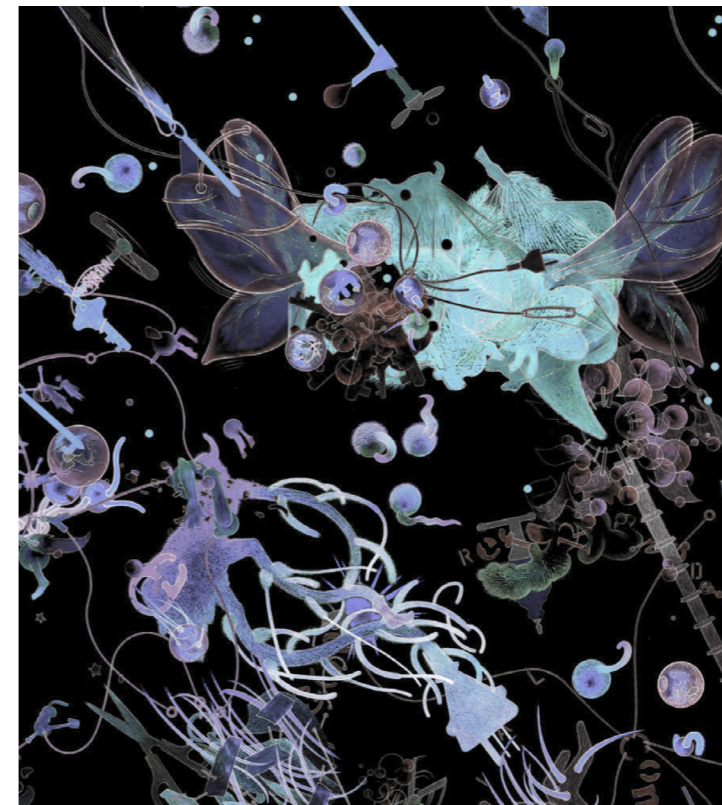


Figure 2.8: Cover illustration for *New Materialism: Interviews & Cartographies* by Tammy Lu

and Descola help open the path toward post-natural condition, where landscapes, politics, and ethics are framed not through static, hierarchical binaries but as dynamic, relational processes of becoming.

Feminism, post-human decentring and the Material turn

Feminist, post-humanist, and new materialist scholars (along with thinkers from other disciplines) agree that Western epistemology and ontology are built on the framework of dualistic exclusions, resulting in systems of domination, subjugation, exploitation, and depletion.⁵⁷ This dualistic logic forms what Plumwood and Haraway describe as the "master model" of human culture⁵⁸, a paradigm grounded in ideals of human sovereignty, transcendence, and self-mastery.⁵⁹ These narratives, Haraway reminds us, are "deeply indebted to racism and colonialism"⁶⁰, revealing how exclusionary

logics have long been entangled with structures of power and oppression.

The post-human concept challenges this centrality of the human in understanding the world. Post-humanism, as articulated by thinkers like Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti,⁶¹ calls for the decentring of human subjectivity and places equal emphasis on the entangled relationships between human and non-human entities.⁶² In this view, the human is no longer the singular agent of history but rather a part of a complex network of interrelations that include animals, plants, technologies, and ecological systems.⁶³ This framework highlights Haraway's concept of "**becoming-with**,"⁶⁴ where human and non-human entities co-evolve, co-create, and shape each other's existence.⁶⁵ Agency is redistributed, no longer resting solely in human hands but spread across a dynamic web of life. Such a shift leads to a reconsideration of ethics, as the boundaries between human and non-human, culture and nature, are increasingly blurred. By situating the human within this relational matrix, post-humanism invites us to question anthropocentric assumptions and challenges us to rethink notions of responsibility, agency, and coexistence in an entangled, post-natural world.

The Material Turn

The material turn, in social sciences, influenced significantly by feminist scholars, challenges the entrenched hierarchies of dualistic thinking by questioning the foundational assumptions behind knowledge production and seeking to address the disconnect between how knowledge is made and the realities it claims to represent. Feminist theory has been central to the development of new materialist, and post-human approaches because the male/female binary is deeply connected to many of the other oppositional frameworks that

ARCHIVE OF OTHERWISE

- A
- Agency^{viii}
- Alien^{vii}
- Alienation
- Anti-naturalism
- Assemblage
- B
- Becoming-with
- Belonging
- C
- Coexistence
- Cyberfeminism
- D
- Decolonising
- E
- Entangled
- F
- Fiction-Friction
- G
- Gaia
- H
- Hybrid^x
- I
- Imaginariness
- Infrastructures
- Intersectionality
- J
- K
- L
- M
- More-than-human
- N
- New-Materialism
- O
- Other
- Otherwise^{ix}
- P
- Post-colonial
- Post-Human
- Post-natural
- Q
- R
- relationality
- Response-ability
- S
- T
- Technomaterialism
- U
- Ubuntu
- V
- worlding^{vi}
- X
- Xeno-
- Xenofeminism
- Y
- Z


Agency NEW ENTRY #51 viii

Agency is not limited to human intentionality but is distributed across plants, more-than-human entities, and marginalized communities, reshaping our understanding of power, resistance, and transformation. It challenges Enlightenment-era notions of agency as individual, rational, and autonomous, instead proposing that agency emerges relationally—through entanglements, infrastructures, and ecologies.

Worlding NEW ENTRY #45 vi

Def:: Worlding is a generative process through which beings—human and more-than-human—shape, transform, and inhabit worlds. Unlike colonial or humanist conceptions of the world as a singular, pre-existing space to be discovered or dominated, worlding acknowledges multiple, overlapping, and contested worlds that emerge through relational entanglements.

Worlding NEW ENTRY #278 vi



Worlding NEW ENTRY #78 vi

Worlding is also a speculative method – a way of imagining *otherwise*. In contrast to narratives of apocalypse or utopia, worlding invites us to navigate precarity, friction, and transformation to embrace uncertainty as a site of possibility

Worlding NEW ENTRY #102 vi

“My fabulated multiple integral equation for Terrapolis is at once a story, a speculative fabulation, and a string figure for multispecies worlding.” – *Staying with the Trouble*, pg.10

Donna Haraway’s equitation for Terrapolis:

$$\Omega$$

$$\int \text{Terra}[x]n = \int \dots \int \text{Terra}(x_1, x_2, x_3, x_4, \dots, x_n, t)$$

$$dx_1 dx_2 dx_3 dx_4 \dots dx_{ndt} = \text{Terrapolis}$$

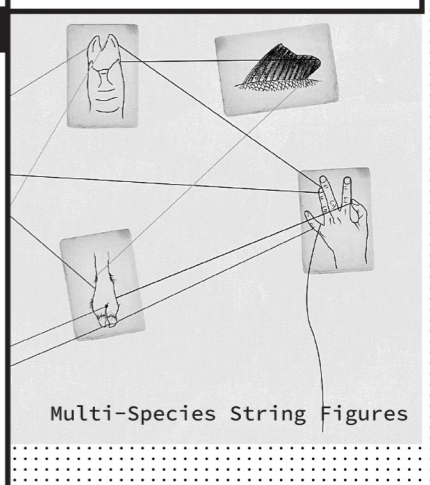
a

x1 = stuff/physics, x2 = capacity, x3 = sociality, x4 = materiality, xn = dimensions-yet-to-come

a (alpha) = EcologicalEvolutionaryDevelopmental Biology’s multispecies epigenesis

Ω (omega) = recuperating terra’s pluriverse

t = worlding time, not container time, entangled times of past/present/ yet to come



2016 — Critic

Alien Xenofeminism and Nonhuman Animals

Bogna M. Konior

[Alienation](#), [Nature](#), [Nonhuman](#)

While the collapse of challenges to pre has been ven liberating th

Alien NEW ENTRY #79 vii

alien is not merely a term of exclusion but a productive rupture—a space of possibility for rethinking human, more-than-human, and urban entanglements. The concept of the alien has long been used to mark the strange, foreign, or othered, reinforcing boundaries between self and other, native and invasive, human and non-human. Alienation as a xenofeminist and post-natural strategy can be reclaimed, where the alien becomes a site for resistance, speculation, and alternative world-making.

Alien

APPROPRIATING THE ALIEN: A CRITIQUE OF XENOFEMINISM

By Annie Goh, 28 July 2018

IS A GROUP OF

XF

The Xenofeminist Manifesto claims, among many things, rationalism and technology as core to a renewed futurist feminist project. However, given the provenance of its moniker and its 'pro-enlightenment' position, Annie Goh asks, WTF exactly is XF?

defensive gestures. XF is an affirmative creature on the offensive, fiercely insisting on the possibility of large-scale social change for all of our alien kin.



Otherwise NEW ENTRY #342 ix

Otherwise =

“the insistence of the possible against the pull of the probable”

– Laura Meek & Julia Alejandra Morales Fontanilla, “Otherwise”, pg274

Otherwise NEW ENTRY #456 ix

In their call for an anthropology of otherwise, Meek and Morales Fontanilla emphasize the importance of “**epistemic unruliness**” and the refusal to treat knowledge as a fixed, hierarchical structure.

Hybrid NEW ENTRY #122 x

1995 Technologies of the Gendered Body: Anne Balsamo
Reading Cyborg Women

1997 You Are Cyborg Hari Kunzru

[Donna] Haraway’s world is one of tangled networks—part human, part machine; complex hybrids of meat and metal that relegate old-fashioned concepts like natural and artificial to the archives. These hybrid networks are the cyborgs, and they don’t just surround us—they incorporate us. An automated production line in a factory, an office computer network, a club’s dancers, lights, and sound systems—all are cyborg constructions of people and machines.

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shape Western thought.⁶⁶ Within feminist scholarship, there has been a shift away from viewing power as centralized, toward recognizing that racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are not just individual prejudices but structural and institutional systems.⁶⁷ Gender itself can be seen as a social institution, shaping society in ways that go beyond personal interactions.⁶⁸ This systematic devaluation of women reflects a broader pattern in which entities perceived as lacking power, including nature, animals, and other marginalized groups are also exploited and devalued. As Val Plumwood argues, Western culture has long upheld a "master model" that places mind, spirit, masculinity, and culture above body, nature, femininity, and matter, creating hierarchies of value.⁶⁹ In critique of this "master model" new materialists call for a rethinking of agency, that acknowledges that objects, environments, and non-human entities participate in social processes, rather than being passive backdrops to human activity. It highlights the entanglement of humans with the material world, urging scholars to rethink power, politics, and ethics in more-than-human terms.

While Donna Haraway may not strictly identify herself with the label of "new materialist" or "post-humanist," preferring to refer to herself as a compostist in *Staying with the Trouble*, "I am a compostist, not a posthumanist: we are all compost, not post-human."⁷⁰ her work is deeply influential within these movements. Her approach to knowledge, ethics, and the politics of the human-non-human relationship positions her as a significant contributor to both new materialist and post-humanist thought. Haraway's critique on the dualistic paradigm through her concept of natureculture, her argument for a situated knowledge, and the need for speculative fabulation in theoretical work will be discussed in the following section, as relevant concepts for the project of this thesis.

Haraway's *Naturecultures*, Situated Knowledge and Science as Storytelling

While Latour and Descola focus on deconstructing the dualisms inherent in Western thought, Donna Haraway offers a feminist-materialist⁷¹ critique of the Western concept of nature. For Haraway, the problem is not simply the separation of nature from culture but the way this divide has justified hierarchies of domination across lines of gender, race, class, and species. In her foundational feminist essay: *A Cyborg Manifesto*, Haraway writes:

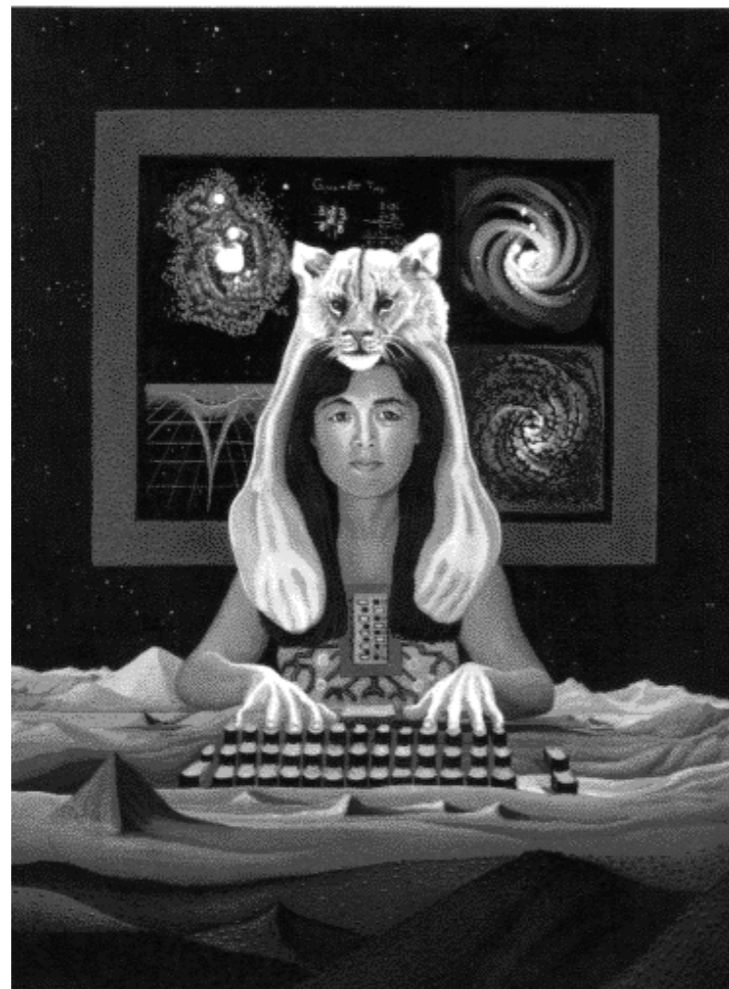


Figure 2.9: Cover image of Donna Haraway's *Simians, Cyborg's and Women*. Painting by Lynn Randolph titled: "Cyborg", 1989

66 See: Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (London: Routledge, 2002); Stacy Alaimo and Susan J Hekman, *Material Feminisms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008); and 67 B. Bar On, "Marginality and Epistemic Privilege," in *Feminist Epistemologies*, ed. L. Alcof and E. Potter (London: Routledge, 1993), 83–100. 68 P. Y. Martin, "Gender as Social Institution," *Social Forces* 82, no. 4 (June 1, 2004): 1249–73. 69 Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993) 70 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016), 101-102.

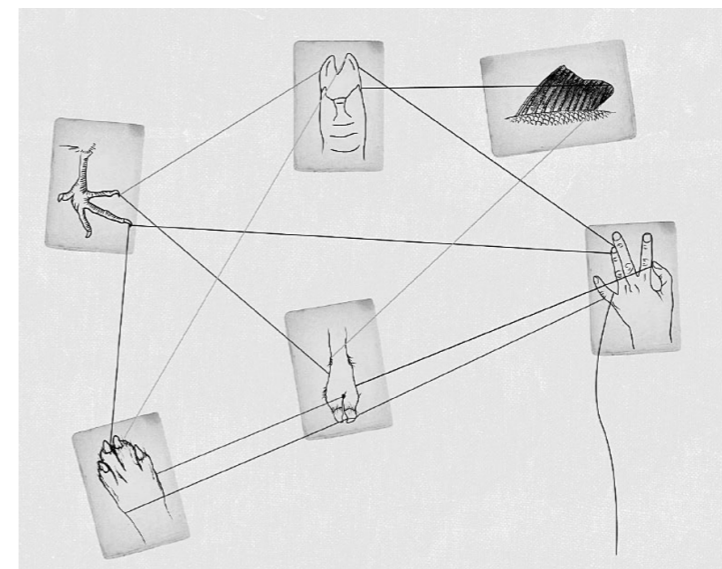


Figure 2.10: *Multi-species Cat's Cradle*, drawing by Nasser Mufti, 2011

“To recapitulate, certain dualisms have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals - in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self.”⁷²

Rejecting these dualisms, Haraway's work focuses on the fluid, shifting borders between human/animal, natural/technological, male/female, self/other.

Natureculture and relationality

In her later works, Haraway radicalises her critique of dualism by introducing the concept of *naturecultures*⁷³ to emphasize

the inseparable entanglement of nature and culture. This term highlights how humans, animals, technologies, and other entities are interconnected in ongoing, co-constitutive processes of becoming.⁷⁴ She critiques the Western philosophical tradition for treating nature as a passive, external domain that humans can observe, manipulate, and control. By contrast, Haraway emphasizes that there is no "pure" nature untouched by human influence, nor is there a human culture that exists outside of nature. The two are always entangled, shaping each other in ways that cannot be disentangled.⁷⁵ She suggests that recognizing the hybrid nature of reality is essential for addressing our contemporary ecological and political condition and challenges the idea that nature exists in a pre-social state or natural state, separate from human influence, instead arguing that our very definitions of nature are shaped by social, historical, and technological processes.⁷⁶

Haraway's relational ontology deepens her post-humanist critique by rejecting the idea of pre-existing, isolated subjects and objects. Instead, she proposes that beings come into existence through their relations with others:

“Beings do not preexist their relatings. [...] The world is a knot in motion. [...] There are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends.”⁷⁷

She emphasizes that relationality is never pure or wholly benign. She underscores the infectious, unpredictable nature of relations, describing how beings constantly affect and change each other:

71 Feminist materialism emphasizes the role of materiality (bodies, environments, and technologies) in shaping gender and power relationships and challenges essentialist ideas of identity. It promotes a relational view of the world, connecting human and non-human agency. Key texts include: Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Victoria, British Columbia: Camas Books, 1985); Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity press, 2013); and Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, N.C., Chesham: Duke University Press, 2007). 72 Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Victoria, British Columbia: Camas Books, 1985), 59. 73 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 1. 74 Ibid. 75 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). 76 Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003). 77 Ibid.

“Sheer contagion. Companion species infect each other all the time. Bodily, ethical and political obligation are infectious, or they should be.”⁷⁸ Haraway’s use of “infection” as a metaphor challenges traditional ideas of purity in human-nature relationships. She critiques normative frameworks that seek to idealise nature as harmonious or innocent, pointing out that such frameworks tend to exclude queer, hybrid, and impure identities.⁷⁹ Instead, Haraway insists that destructiveness, contamination, and queerness are inherent to relationality.⁸⁰ Living with these ambivalences requires acknowledging the costs of human entanglement in the world, an entanglement that comes with ethical and political responsibilities and inevitable consequences.

Haraway’s concept of *naturecultures* is not just descriptive, it has ethical and political implications. By recognizing that nature and culture are entangled, Haraway challenges us to rethink our ethical responsibilities toward the more-than-human world. For Haraway, ethical engagement with *naturecultures* requires moving beyond human-centred perspectives to embrace a multispecies approach. This involves recognizing the agency of more-than-human beings, acknowledging the impact of human actions on ecosystems, and working toward more just and equitable relationships between humans and the more-than-human world. One of Haraway’s key examples of *naturecultures* in action is the genetic modification of crops. This practice blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, as humans use technological tools to alter the genetic makeup of plants. The resulting crops are neither wholly “natural” nor wholly “cultural”, they are hybrid entities that reflect human intervention in natural processes.⁸¹ These practices raise political and ethical questions about who controls genetic resources, who benefits from biotechnological innovations, and who bears the risks. “We are not living in

an era of human mastery over nature, but in a time when the boundaries between the natural and the artificial are breaking down.”⁸²

Naturecultures highlights the inescapable entanglement between human and more-than-human worlds, challenging the idea that nature exists as an external reality separate from culture. This relational view of nature disrupts colonial narratives of *terra nullius*, which informed the Apartheid government’s decision to displace people of colour to the “empty” flats, with little to no regard for the plants, other more-than-humans, and human communities. Instead, recognizing *naturecultures* invites us to engage with the hybrid, co-constitutive processes that shape urban environments, processes in which plants, people, and politics are deeply intertwined.

The Necessity for Situated Knowledge

Haraway critiques the anthropocentric system of production that has “threatened to reproduce, literally, all the world in the deadly image of the Same”⁸³ or in other words “objective” knowledge, which she describes as detached, scalable and reproducible. She challenges the perspective of the “master subject,”⁸⁴ often represented by a powerful, all-knowing man whose viewpoint assumes it can see everything clearly, controlling and organizing all differences, calling this “the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere.”⁸⁵ This “god trick” claims to be neutral and universal, but it actually hides and justifies the dominant position of the person claiming to be objective. The key point here is that knowledge which ignores the position of the knower, pretending to be objective and neutral, lacks transparency and accountability. This kind of knowledge hides the biases and influences that shape it, making it unreliable and incomplete. This critique

78
Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016), 115.
79
Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 189.
80
Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
81
Ibid., 90.
82
Ibid., 122.
83
Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 297.
84
Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Val Plumwood, *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1993).
85
Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 189.

86
Ibid., 195.
87
Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.
88
Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 6.
89
Ibid.
90
Donna Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (Victoria, British Columbia: Camas Books, 1985), 149-181.
91
Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Brantford, Ont.: W. Ross Macdonald School, Resource Services Library, 1978).
92
Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York: Routledge, 1989).
93
Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016), 35.

is central to this thesis, as it challenges hegemonic ways of seeing and organizing, which is necessary when considering urban space in post-colonial contexts like the Cape Flats.

Challenging the notions of hegemonic objectivity, Haraway urges us to embrace situated knowledge, which recognizes that all knowledge is influenced by the perspectives, experiences, and positions of those who create it, which is complex, contradictory, and shaped by their context. According to her, and other feminist writers, this is the essence of ethical relating. Her work is in service to the feminist goal of an “epistemology and politics of engaged, accountable positioning.”⁸⁶ This refers to a positioning which is power-sensitive and truly open for conversation and for the cultivation of new ways of seeing and acting that are meant to refine our capacity for response:

“The task is to become capable, with each other in all of our bumptious kinds, of response.”⁸⁷ There are no preexisting foundations. There are no pre-constituted subjects and objects, and no single sources, unitary actors, or final ends.⁸⁸ For Haraway, the practice of feminist theory is rooted in a “refusal of typological thinking, of binary dualisms, and both relativisms and universalisms of many flavours.”⁸⁹ There is a recognition that the embodied nature of cognition, feeling, and perception grounds us within the material and materializing world, as an entangled part of it.

Speculative Storytelling to Challenge Existing Paradigms

In accordance with her theory on situated knowledge, Haraway states that science is always socially constructed, woven from layers of social relations and cultural assumptions. It has no “core” of pure objectivity and will always be influenced by stories and biases.⁹⁰ Just as Edward Said argued that Western depictions of the East reveal more about Western superiority complexes than about the East itself⁹¹, Haraway states that studies of primates often reflect ideas about what it means to be a “civilized,” white, First World man.⁹² Her answer to this is to create new stories that challenge existing dominant narratives. She writes: “It matters what stories tell stories”⁹³, encouraging critical engagement with the stories we accept as truth, especially those that reinforce power structures. Storytelling, therefore, becomes a central method in her work, where she often mixes theory and fiction to disrupt hegemonic narratives. In *Staying with the Trouble*, Haraway’s final Chapter, titled “The Camille Stories, Children of Compost”, Haraway presents a fictional narrative that was fabricated together with Fabrizio Terranova and Vinciane Despret. In “The Camille Stories”, Haraway illustrates how storytelling can reshape ethical and political engagements with the

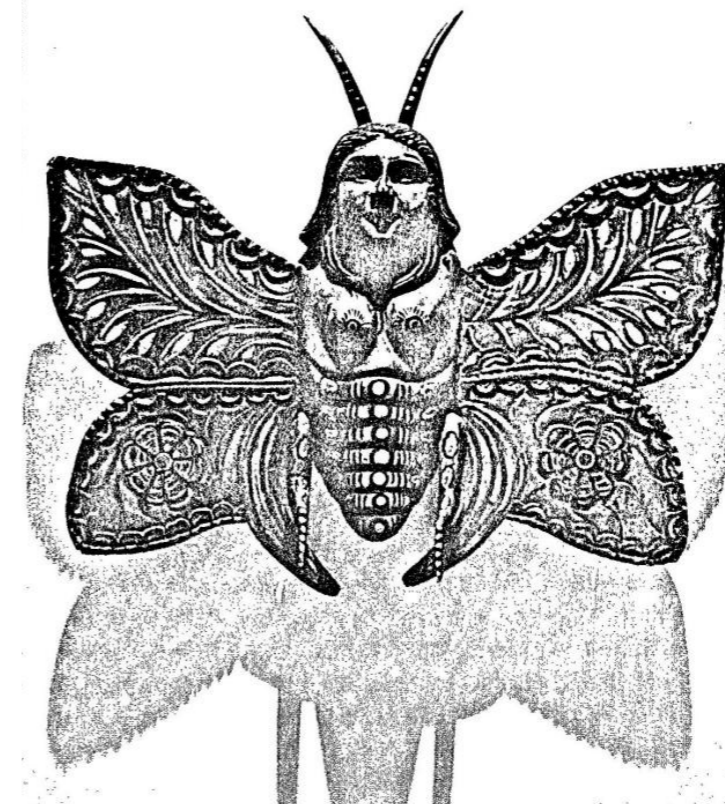


Figure 2.11: Image from Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble*. Mariposa mask, Guerrero, Mexico, Photograph by Jim Clifford.

world. She emphasizes the importance of telling new stories that acknowledge entanglement and complexity, moving beyond hegemonic narratives that prioritize human mastery over nature. On the next page is an excerpt from this speculative fabulation, that engages with Haraway's theories through fiction...

Excerpt from Donna Haraway's Speculative Fiction: *The Camille Stories, Children of Compost*

“None of the Communities of Compost could imagine that they inhabited or moved to “empty land.” Such still powerful, destructive fictions of settler colonialism and religious revivalism, secular or not, were fiercely resisted. The Communities of Compost worked and played hard to understand how to inherit the layers upon layers of living and dying that infuse every place and every corridor. Unlike inhabitants in many other utopian movements, stories, or literatures in the history of the earth, the Children of Compost knew they could not deceive themselves that they could start from scratch. Precisely the opposite insight moved them; they asked and responded to the question of how to live in the ruins that were still inhabited, with ghosts and with the living too. Coming from every economic class, colour, caste, religion, secularism, and region, members of the emerging diverse settlements around the earth lived by a few simple but transformative practices, which in turn lured - became vitally infectious for - many other peoples and communities, both migratory and stable. The communities diverged in their development with sympoietic creativity, but they remained tied together by sticky threads”⁹⁴

94
Donna Haraway, “The Camille Stories, Children of Compost,” in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 138.

95
Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (N.C.): London: Duke University Press, 2016).

96
Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (N.C.): London: Duke University Press, 2016).

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Ibid.

98

Donna Haraway, “The Camille Stories, Children of Compost,” in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 134-168.

99

Matthew Gandy, *Natura Urbana* (MIT Press, 2022).

Though *The Camille Stories* does not directly argue Haraway's theoretical positions, it shows what her ideas might look like in an imagined future. The communities described in the story embody her concepts of entanglement and *sympoiesis*.⁹⁵ Haraway's concept of “staying with the trouble” involves confronting the messiness of the world, rather than trying to escape or deny it.⁹⁶ To “stay with the trouble” means there are no simple solutions, we must navigate carefully, paying close attention to how this “trouble” shapes the distinctions we make in the world. In a world where the current condition calls for alternative futures, “staying with the trouble” speculative stories can become tools through which we can reorganize and reshape our ways of being on a damaged planet.⁹⁷ Haraway proposes that these speculative fabulations are vital tools for envisioning futures that do not accept collapse as inevitable but instead foster ongoing engagements with the complexities of life on Earth.

Haraway's work has been influential for the project of this thesis. Following from Haraway's work on *naturecultures*, this thesis proposes that post-colonial urbanism must account for more-than-human agency to imagine just and sustainable futures in damaged landscapes. In line with Haraway's critique of hegemonic objectivity, this thesis adopts a situated knowledge approach to understanding the Cape Flats and its endangered Fynbos biome. This situated perspective acknowledges the historical and political contexts that have shaped the landscape. Furthermore, Haraway's call to “stay with the trouble” resonates particularly in the context of post-colonial urbanism, where entanglements between colonial legacies, environmental degradation, and social injustice cannot be untangled neatly. Instead of seeking to restore a mythical, pristine nature, this thesis proposes embracing the messiness

of post-natural territories, territories that are already contaminated, hybrid, and full of ghosts. In the same way that Haraway's *Camille Stories*⁹⁸ imagine alternative futures in the ruins of a damaged planet, the speculative potential of thinking with plants to address historical injustice while imagining alternative futures. In embracing plants as political agents, this thesis stays with the trouble of post-natural urbanism, recognizing that the boundaries between nature and culture have already dissolved. The challenge is not to return to a lost purity but to create new stories and practices that account for the entangled, multi-temporal, and multi-species reality of life in post-colonial cities. Haraway reminds us that speculative storytelling is not merely an imaginative exercise but a political tool to challenge dominant narratives and envision futures in which human and more-than-human beings can flourish together. By imagining alternative futures for the Cape Flats that takes Fynbos lives into account, this thesis is also contributing to such stories, stories that refuse the dualistic logic of exclusion and alienation and instead affirm the interconnectedness of all life in the ongoing process of world-making.

Toward a Post-Natural Urban Imaginary

The application of the posthuman and new materialist theory to the urban realm introduces a new paradigm, namely the post natural.⁹⁹ Post-natural theories post that nature has been changed by human interaction to the point where the boundary between what is natural and what is artificial has become blurred, leading to hybrid territories and subjects such as urban nature, genetically modified

organisms and chemically altered geologies.¹⁰⁰ The post-natural condition is one where the natural, human and technological is morphed into a single set of relations. It reshapes our understanding of the environment by framing nature as a subject we modify and engage with in a constant state of change as it modifies and engages with us.¹⁰¹ The prefix -post, is important, as it adds a temporal factor into the human-nature dynamic. It is a condition in which ecological processes persist and mutate within a context that has been shaped and is constantly being reshaped by human and more-than-human activity¹⁰².

The post-natural hypothesis transcends oppositional categorisation and invites us to explore what lies beyond the boundaries of both the natural and human. In abandoning dualistic thinking, the post-natural and post-human paradigm steps into a space where beings, environments, and political forces coalesce into a single ontological field of becoming. The post-natural hypothesis challenges the conceptual frameworks that have long divided nature from culture. It is not simply about dissolving the boundary between the two but about questioning the very conditions under which such a boundary was historically drawn.¹⁰³ As articulated by Latour and Descola the world is no longer a dichotomy of human agency versus natural passivity¹⁰⁴ but a continuous process of co-creation, where all beings human and more-than-human participate in shaping the space we inhabit.¹⁰⁵ This relational ontology, which underpins post-natural thinking, encourages us to see nature as an active agent with political significance, challenging us to rethink how we interact with, study, and plan for the environments we occupy.

This thesis proposes using the post nature condition as a framework through which to think the post-colonial territory. The post-natural project extends beyond

theoretical considerations to engage with the material realities of how humans interact with the world. It reframes the relationship between the built and the natural environment, urging architects, urban planners, and theorists to work with nature rather than on it. In this new paradigm, nature is no longer an object to be controlled or a resource to be exploited but a co-participant in the design and planning process.¹⁰⁶ The post-natural project thus envisions territories as dynamic, hybrid spaces, constantly reshaped by human and more-than-human forces.¹⁰⁷ By embracing relationality and rejecting binary thinking, the post-natural project offers a pathway toward a more democratic form of co-habitation between species. This shift in perspective transforms the way we approach design, inviting creativity, flexibility, and mutual respect as guiding principles in how we inhabit and shape the world.



Figure 2.12: Film still from *Strata Incognita* by Grandeza Studio for the 2023 Venice Biennale's Spanish Pavilion *Foodscapes*. The studio describes the soil as "our closest alien world" and invites audiences to envision alternative relationships with the earth.

100 Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

101 Matthew Gandy, *Natura Urbana* (MIT Press, 2022).

102 Jason W. Moore, "Ecology, Capital, and the Nature of Our Times: Accumulation & Crisis in the Capitalist World-Ecology," *Journal of World-Systems Research* 17, no. 1 (February 26, 2011): 107–46.

103 Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

104 See: Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); and Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

105 See: Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019). & Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993).

106 Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climatic Regime*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018).

107 Matthew Gandy, *Natura Urbana* (MIT Press, 2022).



Figure 2.13: Photograph of urban nature presented by Matthew Gandy in *City of Weeds: Tracing the Origins of the Urban Ecological Imaginary* titled: "Botanists looking for wildflowers on a bombsite, Gresham Street, London (1943)"

Urban Nature and Hybrid Ecologies

The post-natural condition finds one of its most compelling expressions in urban nature. Cities are often seen as spaces of human dominance and technological advancement, seemingly devoid of nature. However, post-natural theory reveals that urban spaces are hybrid ecologies, where human and more-than-human agents interact in complex, unpredictable ways. Urban environments are sites of contamination and transformation, where the boundaries between nature and culture dissolve, giving rise to new forms of ecological life that challenge traditional notions of purity and separation.

In his book *Natura Urbana*, Matthew Gandy highlights how cities are dynamic ecological zones where various forms of life thrive in unexpected ways.¹⁰⁸ Gandy introduces the concept of "ecological constellations," which refers to the interactions between different life forms

and matter in urban spaces, creating hybrid ecosystems that transcend traditional nature/culture binaries.¹⁰⁹ These hybrid landscapes demonstrate that nature in urban areas is not separate from human influence. Instead, it is shaped by political, social, and economic factors. Gandy's analysis reveals that urban wastelands, often viewed as abandoned or neglected, are biodiversity hotspots and sites of ecological innovation.¹¹⁰ These spaces challenge the notion of purity in nature by showing how human and non-human elements co-create urban ecologies.

The post-natural condition constitutes a move from flat, two-dimensional understanding of a territory to an understanding that is thick and messy and intertwined. In post-naturalist theory, *becoming-with* reflects the ongoing processes of mutual adaptation and co-evolution between humans and more-than-humans. Urban nature is

108 Matthew Gandy, *Natura Urbana* (MIT Press, 2022).

109 *Ibid*

110 *Ibid*.

not static, it is constantly shaped and reshaped through interactions between species, technologies, and socio-political structures. For example, through the presence of wildlife in cities, the growth of urban forests, all illustrate how urban nature emerges through relational processes.¹¹¹

In this context, time becomes a critical factor in understanding urban nature. As Anna Tsing emphasizes in her work on multispecies anthropology, temporality shapes human and more-than-human interactions. She argues that we must consider the timelines and transformations of different species to fully understand hybrid ecologies. Her study of Japan's Satoyama forests, conducted with Elaine Gan, highlights how human interventions have shaped the forest's biodiversity over centuries. Through practices like raking the forest floor, Japanese farmers inadvertently created conditions that favoured certain species, such as pine trees and matsutake mushrooms.¹¹² This study reveals how human and non-human actors co-produce landscapes, challenging the idea that nature exists independently of human influence. In urban environments, these entangled temporalities are equally apparent. Urban nature is never a finished product; it is always in flux, responding to human interventions and natural processes alike.¹¹³ Understanding the post-natural condition requires acknowledging the continuity of these transformations and recognizing that all beings participate in shaping urban spaces over time.

Nature in cities is often managed, controlled, and commodified, leading to power dynamics that shape how different communities experience urban environments. Gandy applies Michel Foucault's concept of biopolitics to explore how urban nature is governed. He argues that city governments regulate parks, green spaces, and other aspects of

urban nature as part of broader efforts to manage populations and public health.¹¹⁴ This governance is not neutral. Gandy points out that marginalized communities often have less access to green spaces, highlighting the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens in cities. This unequal distribution aligns with broader discussions in political ecology, which emphasize that environmental transformations are deeply intertwined with social and economic inequalities,¹¹⁵ and is something that is clearly seen in the urban condition of the Cape Flats. This unequal distribution underscores the political dimensions of urban nature and the need for more equitable approaches to urban ecological planning.

The Cape Flats Sand Fynbos in Cape Town exemplifies this post-natural condition of urban nature. The flats fynbos is only found within the confines of the Cape Flats in the city of Cape Town. This critically endangered biome is deeply impacted by colonial histories, urban development, and environmental pressures. Rather than viewing it as a degraded or exploited landscape, post-natural theory encourages us to see the Cape Flats as a dynamic, entangled space, where human and more-than-human actors co-create the environment. By recognizing the political agency of plants and the entanglement of human and more-than-human actors, we can begin to envision more just and sustainable urban futures. The post-natural urban imaginary challenges us to rethink what counts as nature and to embrace hybrid ecologies as sites of possibility and transformation. In this vision, urban nature is not a passive backdrop but an active participant in shaping the world to come.

¹¹¹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016).

¹¹² Elaine Gan and Anna Tsing, "How Things Hold: A Diagram of Coordination in a Satoyama Forest," in *Matsutake Worlds*, ed. Lieba Faier and Michael J. Hathaway (Berghahn Books, 2021), 112–55.

¹¹³ Matthew Gandy, *Natura Urbana* (MIT Press, 2022).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016).



Figure 2.14: An aerial view of Kenilworth Racecourse shows the least degraded example of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos left in the world. Kenilworth Racecourse was built in 1881 and inadvertently protected the habitat inside from urbanisation. It is a prime example of urban nature.



Figure 2.15: Remnants of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos growing between the old pine plantations in the Tokai neighbourhood of Cape Town

Political and Ethical Implications of Post-Natural Urbanism

The post-natural condition challenges traditional notions of environmental management and urban planning by emphasizing the agency of more-than-human actors. In this framework, nature is no longer an object to be controlled or preserved, but a political subject, with capacity to co-create the

future. This shift requires a rethinking of spatial and political agency, moving beyond anthropocentrism to embrace a multispecies approach to urbanism.

As Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti have noted, the post-human subject does not exist independently but emerges through relational networks of human and more-than-human beings. In the urban context, this means recognizing that plants, animals, and other more-than-human entities are active participants in the production of space. The Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, for instance, is not merely a backdrop for human activity but a dynamic agent that shapes urban life in Cape Town. The political ecology of urban nature demands that we consider the unequal distribution of environmental benefits and burdens, as well as the power dynamics that influence who has access to green infrastructures and who bears the brunt of environmental degradation.

As we reach more nuanced understandings of human and more-than-human relations, the question arises: how can we ethically navigate and engage with the post-natural condition? Post-natural theory not only deconstructs the nature-culture divide but also serves as a framework for studying and interacting with territories. It emphasizes that the boundaries we once took for granted no longer hold and that our methods for engaging with the environment must evolve accordingly. The "post-natural" is not simply a conceptual shift but a condition in which human and non-human actors are deeply intertwined, with ecological processes unfolding within a landscape that has been shaped by both. The Cape Flats Sand Fynbos in Cape Town can be seen as a post-natural territory. It is a landscape deeply impacted by human actions, colonial histories, and ongoing environmental pressures. However, rather than seeing it as a degraded or exploited landscape,

post-natural thinking encourages us to recognize it as an entangled, dynamic, and politically significant space.

The Feminist Ethic of Response-ability

Post-natural theory goes beyond simply acknowledging more-than-human entanglements. It actively questions how we should respond to them. If nature is not separate from human activity but co-produced through it, then the ethical implications are profound. What does it mean to co-exist with the more-than-human world in a way that is just and responsible? How can we ethically navigate the consequences and implications of the post-natural condition?

The idea of response is key in the post-natural framework and leads to the feminist ethic of **response-ability**.¹¹⁶ According to feminist theorist Karen Barad, whose work *Meeting the Universe Halfway*¹¹⁷ is a contribution of central importance to the material turn, we are responsible, from the position we inhabit as human beings on the earth, to develop our “response-ability”, our ability to respond to the unfolding of the discursive-material world as embodied human beings, endowed with discernment. She defines response-ability as “an iterative (re)opening up to, an enabling of responsiveness”¹¹⁸ towards the *other*, who is the receptor of the discursive and material practices that we choose to enact: either to infirm or to affirm, to subjugate or to respect. Similarly, Haraway writes that this means learning to pay attention, to always conjugate species difference with affect, entanglement and rupture and to allow creativity and curiosity to characterize all life on earth.¹¹⁹ Whatever territory we are dealing with, the post-natural condition relies on an engagement with the world in a way that acknowledges and respects the agency of all participants.

As we reach more entangled understandings of human and non-human relationships, we must not forget to recognise the political implications that are a part of these entanglements. While many contemporary thinkers agree with the necessity of abandoning the rift between nature and culture in favour of more hybrid, entangled perspectives, these views are not without critique. Some have raised concerns that the dissolution of boundaries between the human and nature risks obscuring important distinctions and complexities that are necessary for understanding ecological and social issues. One such critique is that by blurring the lines between human and more-than-human political agency and accountability could be neglected in the process¹²⁰. As critics, such as Kate Soper, have argued, the bridging of the nature/culture divide risks flattening agential roles and makes it harder to assign responsibility for ecological harm caused by humans and driven by industrial, colonial and capitalist systems¹²¹. Additionally, Feminist and post-colonial scholars have argued that by framing humans and more-than-humans as entangled in a single shared network we might overlook the deep power imbalances that still exist in the world, and how certain human communities: females, people of colour and indigenous peoples, have been systematically disenfranchised alongside more-than-humans.¹²² Soper, emphasises that while relationality offers an important interconnected view, it must be paired with a recognition of asymmetrical power relations to avoid undermining political efforts aimed at addressing these inequalities¹²³.

These ethical considerations are necessary as we move forward with the Cape Flats as a post-natural territory. In the next section the principles of **xenofeminism** and **ubuntu** will be presented as ways through which the post-natural territory can be radically

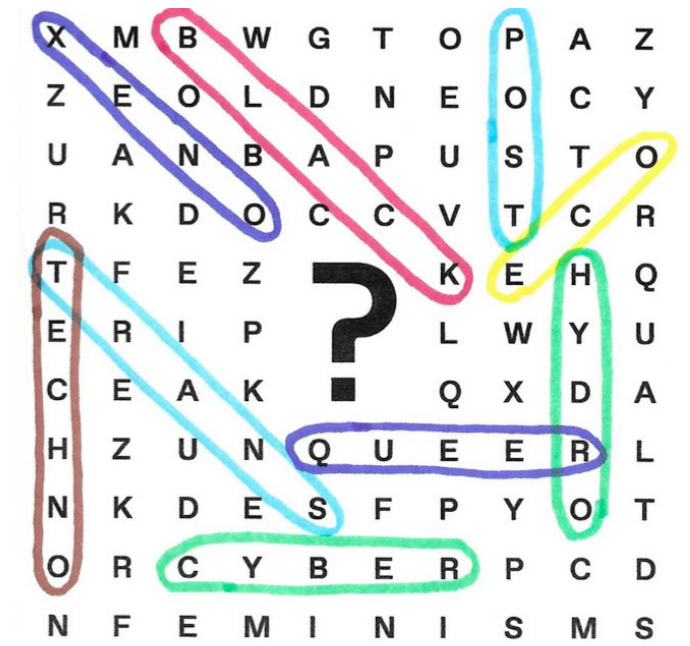


Figure 2.15: Image by the Institute for Post Natural Studies

re-imagined as a space where the alienation of the territory is turned into relationality, through which alternative futures rooted in **anti-naturalism**, relationality and **techno-materiality** can be imagined. Helen Hester, a member of the xenofeminist collective Laboria Cuboniks¹²⁴ explicitly discusses post-naturalism in relation to xenofeminist strategies. She argues for a future-oriented, techno-material politics that moves beyond essentialist ideas of nature. Hester’s notion of “post-natural” aligns with rejecting the fixed boundaries between natural and cultural categories, embracing technological intervention and hybridity as tools for liberation¹²⁵. Both post-natural theory and xenofeminism reject purity and essentialist boundaries, advocating for a messy, relational world where difference is embraced rather than feared.

116
Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC), London: Duke University Press, 2016).
117
Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC, Chesham: Duke University Press, 2007).
118
Karen Barad, “Quantum Entanglements and Hauntological Relations of Inheritance: Dis/Continuities, SpaceTime Enfoldings, and Justice-To-Come,” *Derrida Today* 3, no. 2 (November 2010): 266.
119
Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers, “Involuntary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters,” *Differences* 23, no. 3 (2012): 74–118.
120
See: Kate Soper, *What is Nature*; Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm* and Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*.
121
Kate Soper, *What Is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), Pg 44.
122
See also: Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*; Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*; Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics and Maria Mies, Ecofeminism*.
123
Kate Soper, *What Is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), Pg 49.

124
See: Laboria Cuboniks, n.d., <https://laboriacuboniks.net/>.
125
Helen Hester, *Xenofeminism* (John Wiley & Sons, 2018).

A Manifesto for the Future

Xenofeminism, Alienation and the Relational Ontology of Ubuntu

As discussed in the previous section, against the backdrop of the alienating practice of modernity, rooted in dualistic thinking, and enforced by the ideologies of capitalistic, patriarchal and neo-colonial systems, ways of thinking otherwise are necessary. After exploring, post-human, new material and post-natural theories as shifting the discourse to challenge these hierarchies. This thesis would like to propose moving forward with a combination of principles from xenofeminism and the relational philosophy of ubuntu, as a call to action in imagining a future for the Cape Flats, that turns the alienation of our current paradigm, which led to the exclusion and oppression of both human and more-than-human actors, into a generating force for a new future of multi-species flourishing and equity.

Xenofeminism and Ubuntu offer compelling paths forward. Xenofeminism, as articulated by the Laboria Cuboniks¹²⁶ collective, proposes a feminism that embraces technology, alienation, and hybridity to dismantle oppressive structures and imagine new forms of life. It rejects essentialism, advocating for a radical politics of inclusion that transcends traditional categories of

identity. By embracing the strange and the other, xenofeminism envisions a world where difference is not a threat but a source of strength and innovation¹²⁷. Ubuntu, a Southern African philosophy of interconnectedness and mutual care, provides another vital framework for dismantling binaries. Ubuntu asserts that one's humanity is inextricably linked to the lives of others, with the motto: "I am because we are."¹²⁸ It rejects the individualism and separation inherent in Western thought, promoting instead a worldview grounded in community, empathy, and shared responsibility. Ubuntu recognizes that all beings are part of a greater whole, and that well-being arises from nurturing relationships rather than asserting dominance.¹²⁹ Together, xenofeminism with its radical addressing of the condition of alienation¹³⁰, which is rampant in the Flats, and ubuntu, a philosophy specific to the South African context, offer practical and philosophical tools for moving beyond binary thinking, to propose a future rooted in relationality. These philosophies challenge us to reconsider what it means to be human, to inhabit the world, and to build futures that are more just, inclusive, and sustainable. In this chapter, I propose that adopting a relational, hybrid, and constantly mutating framework, situated in post-natural condition, and catalysed from xenofeminism and Ubuntu principles, can help imagining and constructing alternative futures. Only by embracing the complexity, entanglement, and multiplicity of the world can we address the pressing challenges of our time and envision alternative modes of existence.

¹²⁶ Xenofeminist collective made up of Diann Bauer, Helen Hester, Amy Ireland, Patricia Reed, Katrina Burch and Lucca Fraser.

¹²⁷ Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018).

¹²⁸ Mogobe B Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 1999), 149.

¹²⁹ *Ibid*

¹³⁰ Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018).



Figure 2.17: Laboria Cuboniks' *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*

The Xenofeminist Manifesto

Xenofeminism (XF), as articulated by the Laboria Cuboniks collective in *the Xenofeminist Manifesto*¹³¹, is founded on three core principles: techno-materialism, gender abolitionism and anti-naturalism.

Techno-materialism emphasizes the importance of the mesopolitical sphere, advocating for the construction of new institutions that are both political and global, enabling collective action and transformation. The manifesto calls for a radical rethinking of technological mediation, urging us to repurpose existing infrastructures of alienation for progressive political ends.¹³²

Secondly, Gender Abolitionism seeks to dismantle the particularities of gender, race, and class, aiming for a future free from oppressive categories. XF envisions emancipation for the alienated, exploited, and underclass, recognizing that true liberation requires the transformation of both social structures and the environments that shape them.¹³³ XF further argues that the success

of emancipatory abolitionist projects, aimed at abolishing class, gender, and race, requires a radical reimagining of the universal. The universal, in this context, must be understood as generic and intersectional. Intersectionality, in this sense, is not about fragmenting collectives into static identities, but about using a political framework that slices through each specific instance, rejecting reductive categorisations of bodies.¹³⁴ It is a universal that cannot be imposed from above, but rather must be constructed from the ground up, opening new pathways across an uneven landscape. This non-absolute, generic universality resists the tendency to conflate it with narrow particulars, such as Eurocentric universalism, where categories like the male is mistaken for the sexless, the white for the raceless, or the cis for the real, become the dominant models. Instead, xenofeminism seeks to create a coalitional politics, one untainted by the desire for purity, and that challenges the very foundations of naturalised oppression.¹³⁵ Lastly, anti-naturalism rejects the idea that nature serves as a refuge for injustice or a basis for political justification, challenging the traditional view of nature as immutable and untouchable. XF's rejection of naturalism mirrors post-naturalism's challenge to essentialist categories, proposing instead a view of nature as a space of contestation. In xenofeminism Nature is seen as a dynamic, negotiable terrain for social experimentation and transformation. As the manifesto boldly declares,

" In the name of feminism, 'Nature' shall no longer be a refuge of injustice, or a basis for any political justification whatsoever! If nature is unjust, change nature!"¹³⁶

At the heart of the XF vision is an egalitarian political community, one founded on anti-natural solidarity and supported by a techno-science that aligns itself with these ends. This community is built from and to the margins. The necessity to break down the human-alien binary and reject the naturalisation of all forms of oppression and discrimination is emphasised. This includes not only the exploitation of humans but also the idealisation of a "laissez-faire" attitude toward the lives of more-than-humans.¹³⁷ By challenging these ingrained divisions, xenofeminism seeks to dismantle hierarchical structures that have been justified through naturalised notions of superiority.

Xenofeminism sees the "xeno-", the unknown entity, the strange, the alien, as a navigational principle, extending beyond human relations to include non-human interrelations and epistemic engagements with the unknown.¹³⁸ By affirming a future unbound by the repetition of the present, XF calls for the creation of spaces that offer new possibilities for perception and action, free from the constraints of naturalised identities. Ultimately, it advocates for a vision of feminism that challenges the very foundation of naturalised systems of power.

On Alienation as Impetus for Generating New Worlds

Xenofeminism explores a vision for future-making where alienation is embraced not as a state of disconnection but as a powerful political tool for imagining alternative futures that are both grounded in reality and radically transformative. Rather than simply

accepting alienation as a negative condition, xenofeminism views alienation as a form of longing for alternative futures, a state that opens up possibilities for contemplating concepts beyond our immediate experience.¹³⁹ This "alien" future is not a preordained ideal but an ongoing, dynamic process, that is always in flux and driven by the labour of building a just and novel future. It is a future constantly receptive to unexpected information and new inputs, allowing for continuous mutations and adaptations.¹⁴⁰

This alienation is future orientated and speculative in nature. The labour of perspectival reformatting, as theorised by Patricia Reed, is an ongoing act of care, both a careful and generative force, driven by alienation. In this context, alienation is not understood as a negative condition to be overcome but as a crucial force of estrangement that opens up possibilities for new ways of thinking and being. To be

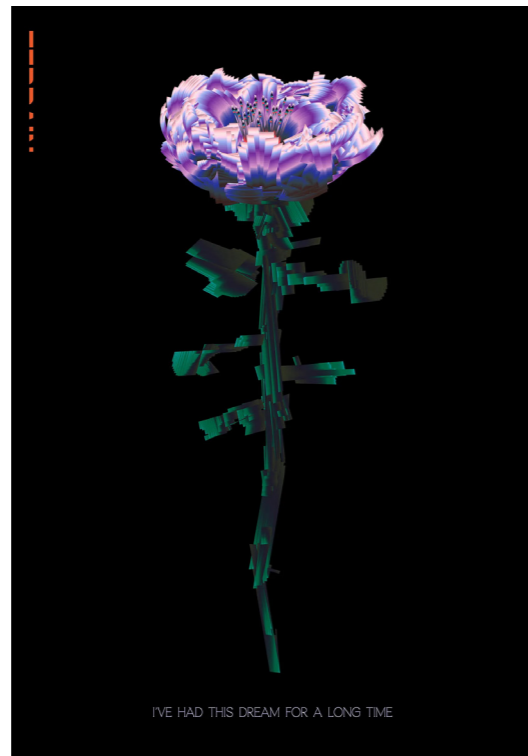


Figure 2.18: David Rudnick's NFT is a digital image called "Stem"—a glitchy rendering of a flower with an ominous subheading: "I've had this dream for a long time."

¹³⁶ Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x1A.
¹³⁷ Catia Faria, "Xenozoopolis: Unnatural Solidarity," *Medium*, January 3, 2021.
¹³⁸ Laboria Cuboniks, *New Vectors from Xenofeminism*, interview by Ágrafa Society, CCCB Lab: Cultural Research and Innovation, February 8, 2022.
¹³⁹ Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x01.
¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 0x17.



Figure 2.19: Cover image of Laboria Cuboniks' *The Xenofeminist Manifesto*

grasped by concepts is to alienate oneself from familiar perspectives, as she writes:

"on a perspectival front, alienation is a necessary force of estrangement from what is".¹⁴¹

This form of alienation is not total, rather, it expresses the quality of a relation, it is always a process of being alienated from something else. To properly understand alienation, it requires reflection in multiple directions, continuously shifting between *what is* and *what could be*.¹⁴²

Alienation is often associated with negative connotations: social anomie, dehumanisation, and disconnection from the world.¹⁴³ However, to avoid the semantic emptiness of these interpretations, it is necessary to ask what non-alienated condition would look like? A world without the XF connotation of alienation would likely bind us to familiar cognitive frameworks, locking us into accepted norms and refusing engagement with the strange, the foreign,

¹⁴¹ Patricia Reed, "Xenophilia and Computational Denaturalization," *E-Flux Architecture*, September 2017.
¹⁴² Patricia Reed, "Xenophilia and Computational Denaturalization," *E-Flux Architecture*, September 2017.
¹⁴³ *Ibid.*
¹⁴⁴ Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x01.
¹⁴⁵ Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x01.
¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

and the unknown. It would cement "common-sense" thinking into the given, preventing the emergence of new possibilities and ways of thinking.¹⁴⁴ This reframing of alienation leads to the XF call to embrace alienation as a political tool. As outlined in the XF Manifesto, alienation is not something to be rejected but embraced as a generative force. It is through the alienation from inherited norms, identities, and systems that new ways of being and acting in the world can be imagined and constructed. Far from being a debilitating loss, alienation in the xenofeminist sense becomes a creative rupture, enabling the formation of new **imaginaries** that challenge existing structures of oppression.

XF positions alienation as a necessary catalyst for creating new worlds. While alienation is often seen as a negative experience, xenofeminism asks: have we ever truly been free from it? According to this perspective, freedom is not something natural or inherent, it's something we must actively create and continuously reshape. Building freedom requires embracing alienation as a tool to break free from the grip of dominant systems and their entrenched ways of thinking. XF rejects the idea that anything, whether material conditions or social structures, should be seen as fixed, permanent, or unquestionable. Instead, it constantly pushes boundaries, exploring new ways of imagining and organizing the world. For those who have been labelled "unnatural" by oppressive norms, such as the exclusion of people of colour in apartheid-era cities, the romanticisation of "nature" offers no comfort. Xenofeminism firmly opposes this idolization of nature and its use to justify injustice, advocating instead for a radically inclusive and transformative approach to change.¹⁴⁵

As the Xenofeminist Manifesto declares: "We are all alienated- but have we ever been otherwise?"¹⁴⁶ Alienation, in this sense, is not something to escape, but a means to forge new paths, a tool for imagining and realising futures that are radically different from the current condition.

XF, Speculative Futures and Architecture: Towards Xeno-spatial Practice.

The framework of XF offers a critical perspective on the intersection of architecture, speculative futures and the politics surrounding fictional narratives.

XF posts that architecture is a both a reflection of societal ideologies, a tool for reshaping those ideologies, and a site for radical experimentation.¹⁴⁷ From XF principles, architecture moves beyond the physical form of buildings and cities to become a transdisciplinary practice that considers policies, codes and social norms as flexible design elements to be reinterpreted and challenged. In Architecture, we are often constrained by rigid conventions and constraints, XF challenges architects to reimagine these constraints through methodologies such as abduction, which is a creative reasoning process that asks: “what could be?” to imagine possibilities beyond what is already established. Which in turn challenges entrenched social constructs and hegemonic structures to propose alternative futures. Thus, rather than retreating into the “natural”, xeno-spatial practice embraces complexity and the unknown and creates new economies of knowledge that speculate on alternative constructs for collective horizons.¹⁴⁸

When the prefix xeno-, which means alien, strange and other, is adopted by architectural practice, alienation is celebrated as an emancipatory force. In this approach, alienation, which is at the heart of contemporary capitalism, is reconfigured as a resource for transformation. As the platform, *Perhaps it is high time for a xeno-architecture to match*, writes, alienation in architecture can become a tool for “liberating ourselves from ourselves” by dismantling exclusionary capitalist and patriarchal ideologies through radical and mutable design processes.¹⁴⁹ Xeno-architecture, as both ideological and material medium, can become a tool for

constructing futures where sites of alienation, exclusion and inequality, such as the Cape Flats, are reimagines as sites for alternative futures.

In *the Xenofeminist Manifesto*, Laboria Cuboniks write that one of the biggest spaces for creating better futures for those who have historically been othered, is in changes to the built environment. As architecture is the embodiment of current ideologies, they propose that the decisions made for the configuration of space are: “ultimately articulations about ‘us’ and reciprocally, how a ‘we’ can be articulated”¹⁵⁰. The XF vision for architecture, as stipulated in *the Xenofeminist Manifesto*, is one where architecture becomes akin to open-source software. Thus, becoming dynamic and perpetually open to mutations and modifications, in order to allow collective emancipation and the dismantling of oppressive structures. Architecture, as an expression of collective identity, has the power to create new forms of social organisation to expand possibilities for coexistence and agency. Thus, “xenofeminists must become attuned to the language of architecture as a vocabulary for collective choreo-graphy—the coordinated writing of space.”¹⁵¹

XF presents a framework for speculative architectural practice that help reshape the conditions of life. Through a leveraging of technologies, infrastructures and design, XF offers a radical vision of the built environment as a tool to dismantle oppressive hierarchies and foster alternative futures.

Alienation and Intersectionality

One of the major critiques of XF is the emphasis on alienation as a universal condition.¹⁵² This risks overlooking the uneven distribution of oppression, which is essential in **decolonising** contested territories like the Cape Flats. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s developed the concept of intersectionality to highlight the distinct and overlapping types of discrimination faced by Black women, which directly challenges the XF assumption of a uniform societal estrangement, by showing how power

147 Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x14.
148 Perhaps it is high time for a xeno-architecture to match, *Xeno-Architecture: Radical Spatial Practice and the Politics of Alienation*, interview by Alison Hugill, *Architect*, February 17, 2017.
149 *Ibid.*
150 Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x14.
151 *Ibid.*
152 Annie Goh, “Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism,” *Mute*, July 29, 2019.

153 See: Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, no. 1 (1989): 139–67; and Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–99.
154 Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018), 0x0F.
155 Sirma Bilge, “Whitening Intersectionality: Evanesence of Race in Intersectionality Scholarship,” in *Racism and Sociology*, ed. W. Hund and A. Lentin (Zurich: Lit, 2014), 175–205.
156 Annie Goh, “Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism,” *Mute*, July 29, 2019.
157 *Ibid.*
158 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
159 Mogobe B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 1999), 45.

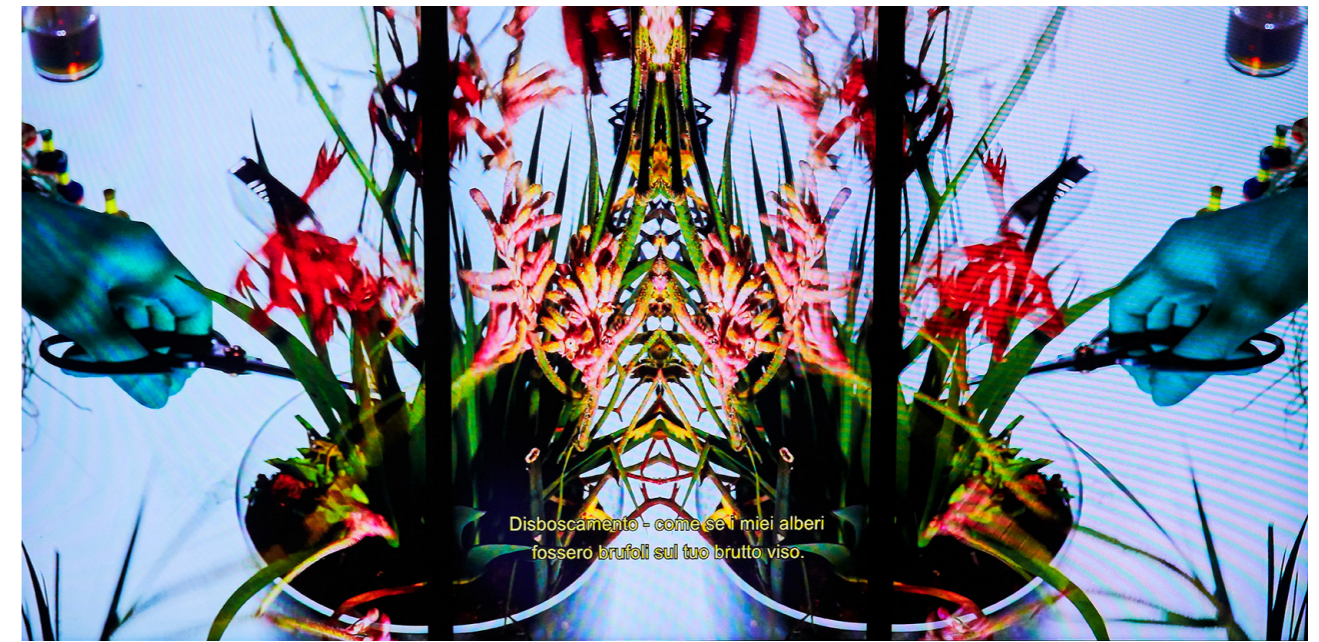


Figure 2.20: *Teatro Della Terra Alienata* is a project by architecture studio Grandeza. It stages a fictional scenario of territorial secession, inspired by the *Xenofeminist Manifesto*

structures operate along multiple, intersecting axes.¹⁵³ However, intersectionality itself has been criticised for being appropriated and striped of its racial dimensions, as can be argued of its use in *the Xenofeminist Manifesto*: “Xenofeminism understands that the viability of emancipatory abolitionist projects—the abolition of class, gender, and race—hinges on a profound reworking of the universal. The universal must be grasped as generic, which is to say, intersectional.”¹⁵⁴ Sirma Bilge describes this process as a “whitening” of intersectionality.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, authors like Annie Goh, have argued that XF’s use of Alienation, could lead what scholars call “sham universalism”¹⁵⁶, a homogenised narrative of equality that dismisses the specific struggles of marginalised groups. An example of this is how the slogan “All Lives Matter” undermines the urgency of racial justice by removing the focus from Black lives.¹⁵⁷ Thus, XF’s call for solidarity through alienation risks flattening the diverse realities of those who experience oppression differently. Which is not what this thesis aims to do. Here, we return to Haraway’s critique of universal knowledge and her call for situated knowledge. She underscores the need for solidarity to be situated and context specific, rooted in the acknowledgment of difference rather than its erasure.¹⁵⁸ Without addressing these critiques, XF is at risk of

perpetuating the same Eurocentric biases it seeks to dismantle.

Addressing the Critique: Ubuntu as Supplement to Xenofeminism

To address this critique, this thesis proposes the relational philosophy of ubuntu as a supplement to xenofeminist theory, to create principles with which to imagine an alternative future for the Cape Flats.

Ubuntu is a Southern African philosophy that emphasises the interconnectedness of all beings, humans, non-humans and the environment. The central tennet of ubuntu is expressed in the phrase *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*¹⁵⁹ (I am, because we are) and which highlights how alienation must be understood as a disruption of relational ties within a broader network of social, ecological and historical relationships. This relational perspective grounds alienation in its contextually specific material and social reality and recognises that beings experience alienation depending on their positionality. Thus, understanding that in a post-colonial city like Cape Town, alienation is not a universal experience but is deeply shaped by colonial histories of displacement, racial segregation, and economic inequality. Through an incorporation of ubuntu’s focus

on restoring relational balance and justice, XF's alienation, which is still an abstract, generalised condition, can become a situated and relational condition that requires context specific imaginaries.

Ubuntu and the Temporal Dimensions of Being

In African Philosophy through Ubuntu, Mogobe Ramose writes that ubuntu is the root of African epistemology and ontology: "The be-ing of an African in the universe is inseparably anchored upon ubuntu. Similarly, the African tree of knowledge stems from ubuntu with which it is connected indivisibly".¹⁶⁰ The philosophy of ubuntu offers a profound conceptualisation of being through its understanding of interconnectedness and wholeness. This philosophy exists in three interrelated dimensions, the living, the living-dead and the yet-to-be-born. This understanding of being is called the "onto-triadic structure of being" and because two of the dimensions contain beings that are unknown or unseen it can be called an "ontology of invisible beings".¹⁶¹

The living, *umuntu*, refers to the present generation, who make the speech and knowledge of being possible. The living-dead, *abaphansi*, are those who have passed away from the physical world but are believed to continue their existence, through the being of those left behind. This dimension reflects a non-linear and cyclical understanding of time and life. The last dimension, the yet-to-be-born, represent the future generation or as Ramose describes: "beings of the future". In the ubuntu philosophy a central responsibility of the living is to preserve and create favourable conditions for them to emerge to. These three dimensions reflect an ontology and epistemology that are fundamentally collective and temporal, encompassing past, present, and future generations.

This reflection is central to the future imagined for the Cape Flats, where temporality is a key aspect, and the present is concerned with both the past and present. This will be one of the teachings of the Fynbos plants, in the

temporal condition. Ubuntu offers a complex view of existence, as a journey that unites past present and future in a dynamic web of relations. It challenges anthropocentric and Western ontologies, emphasising the responsibility to simultaneously care about the present, the past and those who came before, as well as the responsibility to sustain the continuum of life.

According to Ramose ubuntu contains three main insights into life. These three insights will be discussed as principles that when combined with the xenofeminist concept of alienation can be used to speculate on a future for the flats. These insights reflect motion as the essence of being, relational dignity, and mutual care.¹⁶²

Motion as the Essence of Being

The first principle highlights that motion is fundamental to being. It is the universal and indivisible force driving the creation, transformation, and dissolution of all organisms, including humans. This principle emphasises that beings are not static entities but continuously engage with their environment through autopoiesis. This principle has similarities to Margulis and Lovelock's autopoiesis in the Gaia hypothesis, as discussed before. Another aspect of this principle is the recognition that knowledge, especially pertaining to nature, evolves and mutates over time, because nature mutates and evolves over time. This dynamic nature underscores the absence of any "final immutable whole", presenting instead the presence of multiple, transient wholes governed by motion and change. Lastly, ubuntu reflects on a state of "being and becoming" which emphasises an openness to perpetual unfolding and transformation, and acknowledges the fluid and dynamic nature of the world, in contrast with dualistic views of the world that suggest immutability or finality.¹⁶³ This principle of ubuntu aligns closely with Haraway's notion of "becoming-with" and principles of entanglement in post-natural theory.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.
¹⁶¹ Mogobe B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 1999), 45.
¹⁶² Mogobe B. Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 1999), 108-109.
¹⁶³ *Ibid.*
¹⁶⁴ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016).



Figure 2.21: Sanaa Gateja's "Voices of Peace", communal made tapestry, inspired by the principles of ubuntu paper beads on bark cloth, 2023

Relationality and a Decentred World

The second principle asserts that life is best understood through relationships. These relationships constitute humans, more-than-humans and their environments. In this insight, interdependence is put above individualism, acknowledging the entanglement of all beings existing together in a specific space. Most importantly, the principle of a decentred universe is put forth. Here, in contrast to Western anthropocentric narratives, no single human being or entity occupies the centre of the universe. Instead, existence is a product of constant interaction and interdependence among all beings. This ubuntu insight into life challenges anthropocentric views by offering a vision of existence as a dynamic and interconnected web where the flourishing of all beings are interdependent.¹⁶⁵

Multi-Species Care

The third principle expands the idea of relational dignity as including humans, more-than-humans and the physical environment. This principle asserts an ethical reciprocity, where mutual care and sharing extend beyond interpersonal relationships to include a relationship with nature. This reflects an ethic of coexistence. An important tenet in this principle is the decentred self. From the decentred self the most realistic perspective on life is found, one where interconnectedness and entanglement are accepted and anthropocentrism rejected.

An Afroxenofeminist political philosophy

The convergence of xenofeminism and ubuntu, offers a framework with which to

imagine a future for the Cape Flats that counters the exclusion and alienation left as scars on the territory by colonial, patriarchal and capitalistic practice. XF's embrace of alienation as a generative force, its rejection of naturalisation and its call for inclusive hybridity presents a radical departure from the dualistic thinking that has shaped oppressive systems. Ubuntu, with its emphasis on interconnectedness and multi-species care provides a contextually grounded, relational ontology that highlights the importance of a collective wellbeing. Together, afroxenofeminism (AXF), a philosophy coined for the speculative project of this thesis proposes alienation as a tool with which to reimagine a territory grounded in mutation, relationality and multi-species care. This synthesis challenges architects of the future to adopt hybrid, adaptive approaches that dissolve boundaries, embrace complexity, and imagine alternative modes of coexistence.

In the context of the Cape Flats, this framework serves as both a critique and a catalyst that turns alienation into a productive force for reimagining the post-colonial city. It calls for the deconstruction of the inherited paradigm and the imagination of new, speculative practices rooted in equity, mutual flourishing, and a recognition of our entangled existence. By bridging speculative futures with deeply relational ontologies, the principles of xenofeminism and ubuntu offer a blueprint for creating multi-species, post-natural landscapes that are inclusive, and transformative.

The next section will contain the imagined manifesto of the AXP, the African xenofeminist party, who in the speculative future form a coalition government with the current ruling party the ANC. The AXP manifesto as presented in Appendix A of the fictional novel *Fynbos Futures*, together with Appendix B: Concerning Fynbos, which speculates on three principles of Fynbos worlding, becomes the policy through which the fictional narrative and eventually the future scenarios for the Cape Flats are imagined.



FYNBOS FUTURES



(Manuscript)

FYNBOS FUTURES

Appendix A:

The Afroxenofeminist Manifesto for Cape Town

Afroxenofeminism is the mixture of Xenofeminist principles that call for a reappropriation of the alien & the relational ontology of the African philosophy of ubuntu.

0x0i

Afroxenofeminism first emerged in university campuses around South Africa in 2024, with UCT leading the rally

Together we stand at the threshold of a new future, where the scars of the old reveal the possibilities for a future reimagined. Afroxenofeminism emerges as a rallying cry for those who challenge the oppression, alienation and ecological collapse inherited by modernity. It is a manifesto for future-thinking, a radical synthesis of xenofeminist principles and ubuntu, which acknowledges that our future is inextricably tied to that of other, human and more-than-human alike.

In the current condition, where colonial and apartheid legacies, patriarchal systems and extractive economies threaten planetary collapse, we declare our commitment to dismantle oppressive infrastructures and to rebuild from the scraps. Afroxenofeminism repurposes alienation as a catalyst to collectively imagine an alternative future for the mother city, our Cape Town. A future that embraces difference, complexity and entanglement. We recognise the interconnectedness of all beings and envision a city where care, collaboration and justice extend

THIS MANIFESTO WAS WRITTEN PARTICULARLY FOR THE CITY OF CAPE TOWN TO REIMAGINE THE CITY OF COEXISTENCE & MULTI-SPECIES FLOURISHING

across species, technologies and territories.

This is a call to action for a multi-species politics that boldly reclaims the technosphere, rejects purity, and seeks emancipation through radical reinvention. The Afroxenofeminist Party is not a government but an ecosystem of care, imagination and mutation. Ours is a politics that does not fear the alien, for it is the alien that shows us how to be otherwise.

0x01:

Justice Beyond the Human

We reject the false dichotomy of culture/nature. Instead choosing to celebrate the messy, hybrid ecologies of our city. More-than-humans are not mere resources but agents with capacity to act in the world and with which we as humans are inextricably entangled. Our politics centres a multi-species coexistence. We reimagine governance as an interconnected network of care.

0x02:

Alienation as Emancipation

We embrace alienation as a tool for liberation. In the Cape Flats, alienation is the experience of the uprooted, the people displaced from their homes, plants confined to delineated spaces, and soil stripped of its worth. In our collective future alienation becomes a starting point for new possibilities and solidarities. To be alien is to be

other, and to be other is to be free from the constraints of outdated social constructs. Through ubuntu, we recognize the alien not as the foreign, but as a vital extension of our interconnected existence. We reject the tyranny of borders (physical, social, and intellectual) prohibit stifle collaboration and coexistence.

0x03:

Towards a Multispecies Governance

We recognise that human beings are not the only ones with the capacity to shape and influence environments. With ubuntu principles of interconnectedness and decentring in mind, we aim to incorporate the agency of more-than-humans in decision making for the future of the city. Particularly we aim to work with the Fynbos, who know the territory better than any human living today can.

0x04:

Decolonising TechnoScience

We accept technology as neither neutral not monolithic, but as a contested space. We reclaim it as a tool for dismantling oppressive systems and decolonising knowledge. Afroxenofeminism reimagines technology as an entangled space where African tradition, meets the potential of open-source innovation. We wield technology to cultivate coexistence.

0x05:

A Call for Contamination

We reject purity as a relic of oppressive ideologies. The future we imagine, thrives in the contaminated, the ambigious, the liminal. We embrace the hybrid, the mutant and the impure as sites of resistance and transformation.

0x06

Remembering to Remember

To reimagine the future, we must remember the past. The soil is pregnant with the past. We must recognise the scars of colonial violence, forced removals and ecological devastation. We unearth these memories, not to dwell in pain but to reimagine the future. We believe justice is found in acknowledging the layers of history while planting seeds for the future.

0x07:

Radical Hospitality

Ubuntu teaches us that we are inextricably tied to our relationships, with each other, with other species and with the earth. We extend this to the alien, the stranger, the migrant, and the excluded. We aim to cultivate spaces of radical hospitality, where difference is celebrated.

0x08:
Mutating Futures

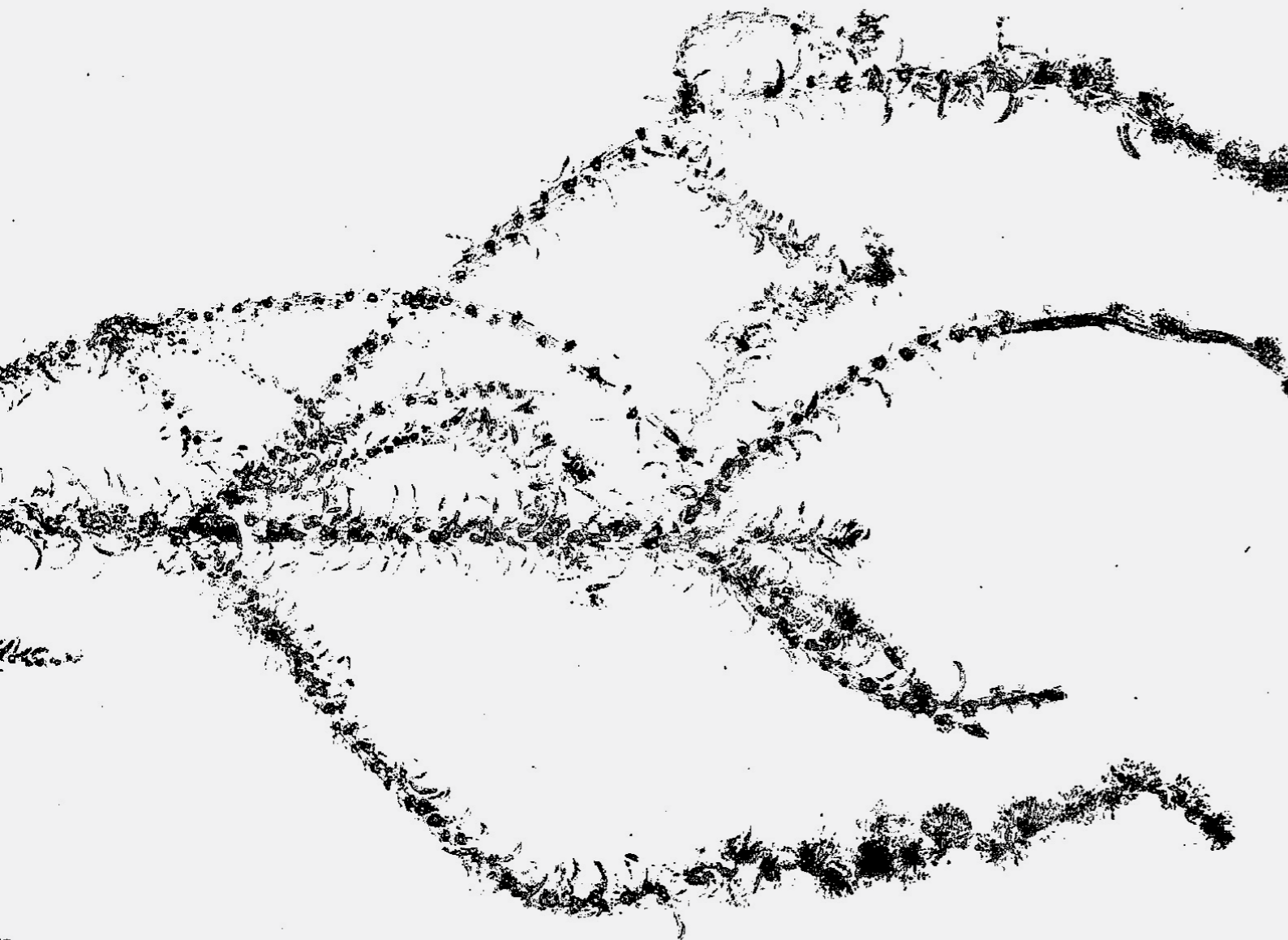
We acknowledge that the future is always an unfinished project, an ever-evolving, mutating imaginary. We reject closure and certainty, choosing instead to stay with the trouble and embrace the open-endedness of becoming.

0x0c

From the cliffs of the peninsula, the dunes of the Cape Flats to the top of Table Mountain, we commit to reimagining this city as a site of radical care, justice, and coexistence. By embracing and repurposing its infrastructures of alienation, breaking down its borders, and celebrating its entanglements, we declare Cape Town not just as a city of the past, but a laboratory for the futures we

dare to imagine

IT IS FROM THE
PRINCIPLES OF THIS
MANIFESTO THAT
THE FLATS ARE
REIMAGINED



Fynbos Futures - Manuscript

Toward an Entangled Future

This chapter has presented the framework with which to reimagine the future of the Cape flats as a dynamic, relational and post-natural territory. Through the imagined political philosophy of afroxenofeminism, which is informed by the relational philosophy of ubuntu and the xenofeminist repurposing of alienation, the chapter proposes the critical tools necessary to dissolve dualisms and embrace the hybrid ecology of the Cape Flats. The framework underscores the necessity of moving from anthropocentric perspectives to alternative possibilities for coexistence, mutual care and multi-species flourishing.

As this thesis moves forward, the next chapter delves into the material and ideological infrastructures of alienation that are present in the Flats. These systems of exclusion, rooted in colonial histories and perpetuated through architectural and urban planning, socio-economic stratification, and ecological neglect, form the backdrop against which this framework must act.

03

Infrastructures of Alienation in the Neo- colonial City



Cyanotype of an Erica
branch and its flowers.
Made by author and Erica

Infrastructures of Alienation in the Neo-colonial City

Building on the conceptual frameworks established in the previous chapter, this section grounds post-natural and xenofeminist theories in the specific territorial context of the Cape Flats. By investigating the historical and ongoing infrastructures of alienation that have shaped this contested landscape, we uncover how ecological and social exclusion intersect in ways that endure to this day. The exploration of urban and plant politics and the legacy of colonial durabilities within Cape Town sets the stage for speculative interventions in the subsequent chapters, where alternative futures will be imagined. The Flats, with its unique Fynbos biome, stands as a poignant example of both ecological and socio-political alienation. The forced removals of apartheid fractured communities imposed a form of ecological alienation, severing people from the land and their botanical companions. Yet, alienation in this context is more than a historical artifact, it is an active, living force that continues to shape both human and more-than-human lives in contemporary Cape Town. The chapter delves into the spatial politics of alienation. It examines how apartheid urban planning weaponised urban design, laws and landscapes to perpetuate exclusion and how these legacies persist today. It interrogates the logics of apartheid that sought to naturalise segregation to expose the city's landscapes as political and contingent rather than neutral or given.

Drawing on the post-natural and xenofeminist frameworks, presented in Part 02, this chapter argues that alienation can be reimagined as

a productive force for dismantling colonial spatial legacies. By shifting the focus from exclusionary narratives to the possibilities of co-creation between human and more-than-human agents, we open pathways for alternative urban imaginaries. The chapter highlights how nature itself was instrumentalised as a tool of separation and control, while also revealing the enduring power of Fynbos as a political actor within the landscape. The Flats Fynbos biome, long marginalized in ecological and urban discourse, offers a post-natural site of entanglement where the boundaries between human and more-than-human, culture and nature, city and nature dissolve. These blurred boundaries challenge colonial spatial orders and invite new forms of radically inclusive, xeno-futuristic dwelling. The chapter aims to paint a nuanced picture of how alienation in

Cape Town operates through a network of spatial, ecological, political, cultural, socio-economic, and symbolic infrastructures. These infrastructures not only perpetuate inequality but also offer sites of resistance and potential transformation when viewed through a post-natural lens. The chapter argues that recognizing these alienations and their intersections with urban nature, opens up possibilities for imagining alternative urban futures that challenge colonial legacies, and embrace multi-species entanglement.

The chapter concludes by proposing that alienation, when reframed through post-natural theory, becomes a catalyst for transformative urban politics. Decolonisation remains central to this counter-struggle, particularly in contested territories like Cape Town, where colonialism eradicated commons, desiccated entire species, and disrupted indigenous ways of life. By embracing alienation as a generative force, we open space for new ecological solidarities that transform exclusionary infrastructures into catalysts for co-creation and mutual care. The notion of *fiction-friction* invites us to see alienation not merely as a condition of estrangement but as a productive tension that can ignite transformative change within post-colonial urban spaces.

The Neo-colonial City

Cape Town's urban landscape is profoundly shaped by its colonial and apartheid pasts, and it continues to bear the marks of these histories in ways that reflect the city's ongoing

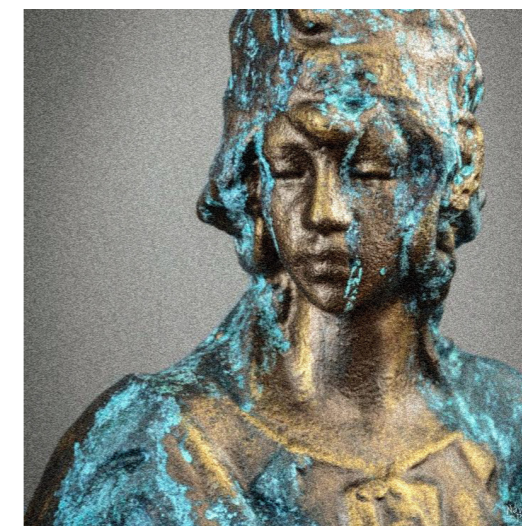


Figure 3.1: Image to illustrate Stoler's use of patina as metaphor for colonial durabilities

neo-colonial¹ condition. Ann Laura Stoler's concept of colonial patina offers a useful framework for understanding how these historical residues persist in contemporary urban governance, social relations, and ecological practices.² Much like a patina on aged objects, these colonial durabilities manifest as subtle, insidious traces that shape life in Cape Town, influencing how spaces are perceived, used, and valued. In Cape Town, this patina can be seen in spatial segregation, land ownership patterns, conservation policies, and even in the cultural imaginaries that define who belongs in the city's urban and natural environments.

Neo-colonialism in Cape Town operates through both visible and invisible infrastructures that perpetuate historical inequalities. While formal colonial rule has ended, the city remains structured by the same logics of exclusion and control that defined its colonial and apartheid eras. For instance, the legacy of the Group Areas Act still lingers in the spatial organization of the city, where wealthier, predominantly white communities occupy central, resource-rich areas, while marginalized communities remain relegated to the peripheries, such as the Cape Flats³. These spatial patterns are reinforced by urban planning and development practices that continue to prioritize the interests of global capital and elite residents over the needs of historically oppressed groups⁴. The concept of the neo-colonial city extends beyond physical spaces to include the cultural and epistemic frameworks that shape urban life. In Cape Town, urban nature is often framed through a Western conservationist lens that prioritises preservation for tourism and elite recreation, rather than recognising the deep,

¹ Neo-colonialism refers to the continuation of colonial power structures and systems of domination in formerly colonized countries through economic, political, and cultural mechanisms. Unlike direct colonial rule, neo-colonialism operates indirectly through global capitalism, international institutions, and cultural narratives that maintain inequalities and dependence on former colonial powers. Key thinkers on the subject include Kwame Nkrumah, who coined the term in: Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1965); and Frantz Fanon, who explores the psychological and socio-political effects of colonialism in: Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961). Contemporary scholars like Achille Mbembe examine how colonial legacies persist in postcolonial governance, urban space, and racial capitalism, see: Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

² Ann Laura Stoler's concept of colonial patina refers to the lingering effects and traces of colonial histories on contemporary societies, institutions, and spaces. The term "patina" metaphorically captures the accumulated residues of colonialism that persist over time, much like the thin layer that forms on the surface of aged objects. These residues can manifest in material, emotional, and cognitive forms, shaping social relations, cultural norms, governance, and urban landscapes long after formal colonial rule has ended. Stoler is particularly interested in how colonial pasts continue to influence power structures and ideologies in the present, often in ways that are subtle, insidious, and normalized. See: Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

³ Ivan Turok, Leanne Seeliger, and Justin Visagie, "Restoring the Core? Central City Decline and Transformation in the South," *Progress in Planning* 144 (February 2021): 100434.

⁴ Ivan Turok, Justin Visagie, and Andreas Scheb, "Social Inequality and Spatial Segregation in Cape Town," in *Urban Socio-Economic Segregation and Income Inequality: The Urban Book Series*, ed. Maarten van Ham et al. (Cham: Springer, 2021), 76.

⁵ Lance Van Sittert, "The Intimate Politics of the Cape Floral Kingdom," *South African Journal of Science* 106, no. 3/4 (April 13, 2010).

⁶ Statistics South Africa, "Inequality Trends in South Africa: A Multidimensional Diagnostic of Inequality, Report No. 03-10-19" (Pretoria: Statistics SA, 2019).

⁷ Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

entangled histories of human and more-than-human interactions in these spaces. The Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens, for example, were established as a colonial project to classify and control the region's flora, and they remain emblematic of a conservation model that excludes indigenous knowledge systems and practices.⁵ While efforts have been made to incorporate more inclusive narratives, the underlying structures of exclusion remain largely intact. In addition to spacial and ecological infrastructures, Cape Town's neo-colonial condition is perpetuated through economic and political systems that prioritise neoliberal development agendas. Large-scale urban projects often serve the interests of multinational corporations and wealthy investors, while the city's poorer communities face displacement and disenfranchisement. The commodification of urban space, including the privatisation of public lands and natural resources, reinforces these inequalities, creating a city that remains divided along racial and economic lines.⁶ Colonial durabilities are also evident in Cape Town's symbolic landscapes. Sites such as District Six, which remain largely vacant despite land restitution efforts, serve as poignant reminders of the city's history of forced removals and spatial injustice. These spaces reflect the failure to fully address the historical wrongs of apartheid and highlight the ongoing marginalization of displaced communities. The language of erasure and absence pervades these spaces, rendering them both sites of memory and symbols of unresolved colonial violence. Colonial and apartheid-era ideologies continue to shape how knowledge, history, and culture are produced and valued in Cape Town, entrenching epistemic infrastructures

alienation.

Understanding Cape Town as a neo-colonial city requires recognizing that the processes of colonialism did not simply end with political independence. Instead, they have been reconfigured in ways that continue to shape the city's socio-political and ecological dynamics. As Ann Laura Stoler argues, colonial patina is not just a residue of the past but an active force that shapes present realities.⁷ In Cape Town, this patina manifests through spatial inequalities, conservation policies, economic exclusion, and cultural narratives that privilege certain histories and ways of knowing while marginalizing others.

By applying the lens of post-natural theory, this thesis argues that recognising these colonial durabilities is essential for imagining alternative urban futures. The entanglement of human and more-than-human lives in Cape Town's urban spaces offers opportunities to disrupt neo-colonial logics and create more inclusive, equitable forms of dwelling. This requires challenging the dominant narratives that frame urban nature as a resource to be managed and controlled, and instead embracing a relational approach that acknowledges the agency of plants, landscapes, and marginalized communities in shaping the city's future. Through these interventions, the neo-colonial city can become a site of resistance and transformation, where the residues of colonialism are not only acknowledged but actively dismantled.

The Spatial Politics of Alienation in Cape Town

The spatial fabric of Cape Town is inscribed with the enduring scars of apartheid, a system built on alienation, that violently restructured the city into segregated zones defined by race and power.⁸ The Cape Flats, became the enforced home of non-white communities forcibly removed from vibrant urban centres under laws like the Group Areas Act. These removals not only fractured social bonds but redefined landscapes as active participants in apartheid's project of segregation. In this imposed geography, nature itself operated as a *dispositif*⁹, a mechanism through which exclusion, alienation, and control were constructed and maintained. Under apartheid, the Cape Flats became an arena of contested interactions between human and more-than-human actors. Landscapes were weaponised to enforce systemic injustice, transforming the natural environment into a tool for division and domination. The Cape Flats became a site of material and symbolic violence, perpetuating exclusion and alienation. However, post-natural theory reframes this historical narrative by recognizing the agency of more-than-human actors, such as the flats fynbos plants that co-constructed this contested territory. In doing so, they challenged apartheid's rigid control, resisting through the very materiality of their existence. The Flats Fynbos biome, despite its marginalization, thus emerges as a site of resilience, memory, and resistance, where suppressed meanings of place and identity persist. This chapter interrogates how the forced removals and the manipulation of landscapes alienated the communities of the Cape Flats from the rest of the city, while also considering how this alienation created the dynamic interplay between power, resistance, and co-creation. This analysis is necessary for reimagining the Cape Flats not only as a site

of historical violence but as a fertile ground for alternative futures shaped by the material and symbolic capacities of more-than-human agency.

Made Alien

In the 1950s, 60s and 70s in South Africa, Cape Town's city planners, ruled by the Nationalist Party and supported by a militarized police force, forcibly removed non-white families and communities from their homes in the city centre, where they had been living for hundreds of years. They were relocated to "townships"¹⁰ in the Cape Flats, a flat, windy area between the coastal plains of false bay and the Table Mountain range (see figure 1.4). At the time of the removals, the area was dominated by drift sand dunes, wetlands, the low bush vegetation of the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos. The only human settlement was a few farms and roads that skirted the area. Those classified as "coloured" were relocated to the areas of Athlone, Atlantis, Bonteheuwel, Bishop Lavis, Hanover Park, Heideveld, Manenberg, Mitchells Plein, Elsies River, Lavender Hill, Steenberg, Grassy Park, Lotus river, Retreat, Parkwood and Rondebosch East¹¹. Further out in the Cape flats "group areas" were created for those classified as "African".¹² These areas were Langa, Nyanga, Gugulethu, Khayelitsha, Crossroads and Delft. The process of removal from their homes, and the monotony of the townships to which they were displaced caused a rupture to open between the people and the land which they occupied.¹³ The Cape Flats is still seen by many as a "nowhere place". A place

8 Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land - Land, Landscape and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2006). Pg 208.
9 See: Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972). 194-197.

10 In the South African and Cape Town context, "townships" refer to underdeveloped urban areas that were racially segregated and designated for non-white residents during apartheid. These areas were created under laws like the Group Areas Act to enforce the spatial separation of racial groups, often located on the peripheries of cities and characterized by inadequate infrastructure, overcrowding, and limited access to economic opportunities.

11 Coloured townships were further sub-divided along class lines. Working-class coloureds had to rent substandard council flats in areas like Lavender Hill or Steenberg. More-well-to-do coloureds e.g. teachers and small business owners or as Mohamed Adhikari describes them the "petty bourgeoisies" see: Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough* (Ohio University Press, 2005), could own single family houses with gardens as in Grassy Park, Southfield and Retreat. Rondebosch East was used as an edge zone by the Apartheid city planners.

12 Under apartheid, "African" was a racial classification used to refer to Black South Africans who were of indigenous African descent.

13 Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land - Land, Landscape and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2006). Pg 208.

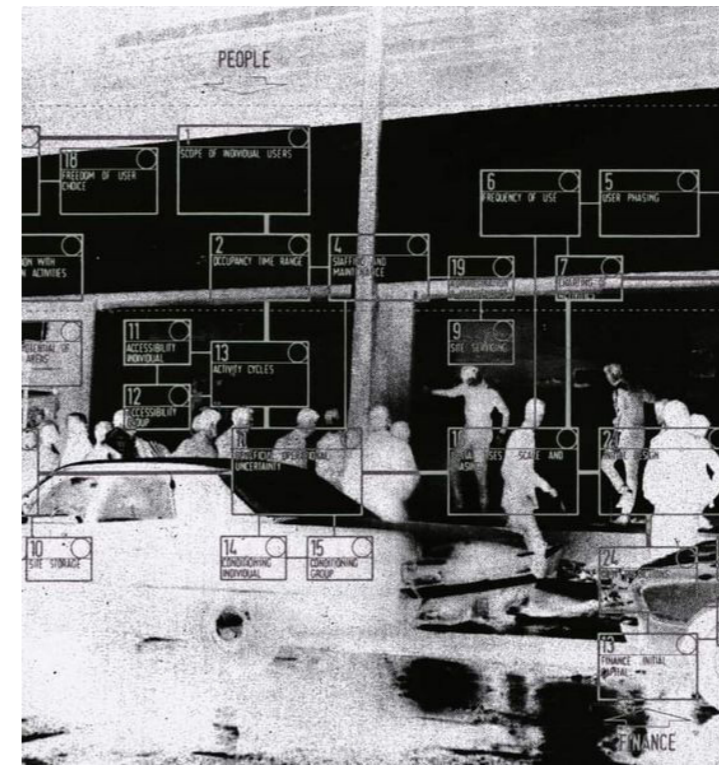


Figure 3.2: Ghostly image of the city

14 Group Areas Act, Act No. 41 of 1950: This act forced physical separation between races by creating different residential areas for different races. It led to forced removals of people living in "wrong" areas, for example "Coloureds" living in District Six in Cape Town.

15 According to: Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan, *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1990), the numbers of people and the reason for their removals were:

Farm evictions: 1,129,000
Black spots and consolidation: 614,000
Urban: 730,000
Informal settlements: 112,000
Group Areas: 860,400
Infrastructural: 103,500

Total: 3,548,900 people forcibly removed under apartheid

Figure 3.2: Drawing to illustrate the areas of Cape Town from and to which people were forcibly removed in apartheid

from which to escape.

Before the group Areas Act¹⁴, that was implemented in 1950, forced removals had already been taking place in South Africa, but it was the introduction of the act that made the removals increase in number and ferocity. Between 1960-1983 approximately three and a half million people were displaced, with around 860 000 of these happening within urban areas under the Urban Areas Act.¹⁵

16 Later, people of colour could claim residency under "Section 10" rights, which were available under the Native Urban Areas Act only if they had been permanently resident and employed in an urban area for more than ten years.

17 See, for example, Mongane Wally Serote's "City Johannesburg," Dennis Brutus's "Shadows," and Oswald Mtshali's "Nightfall in Soweto," all of which evoke themes of invisibility and marginalization.

Made Invisible, and silent

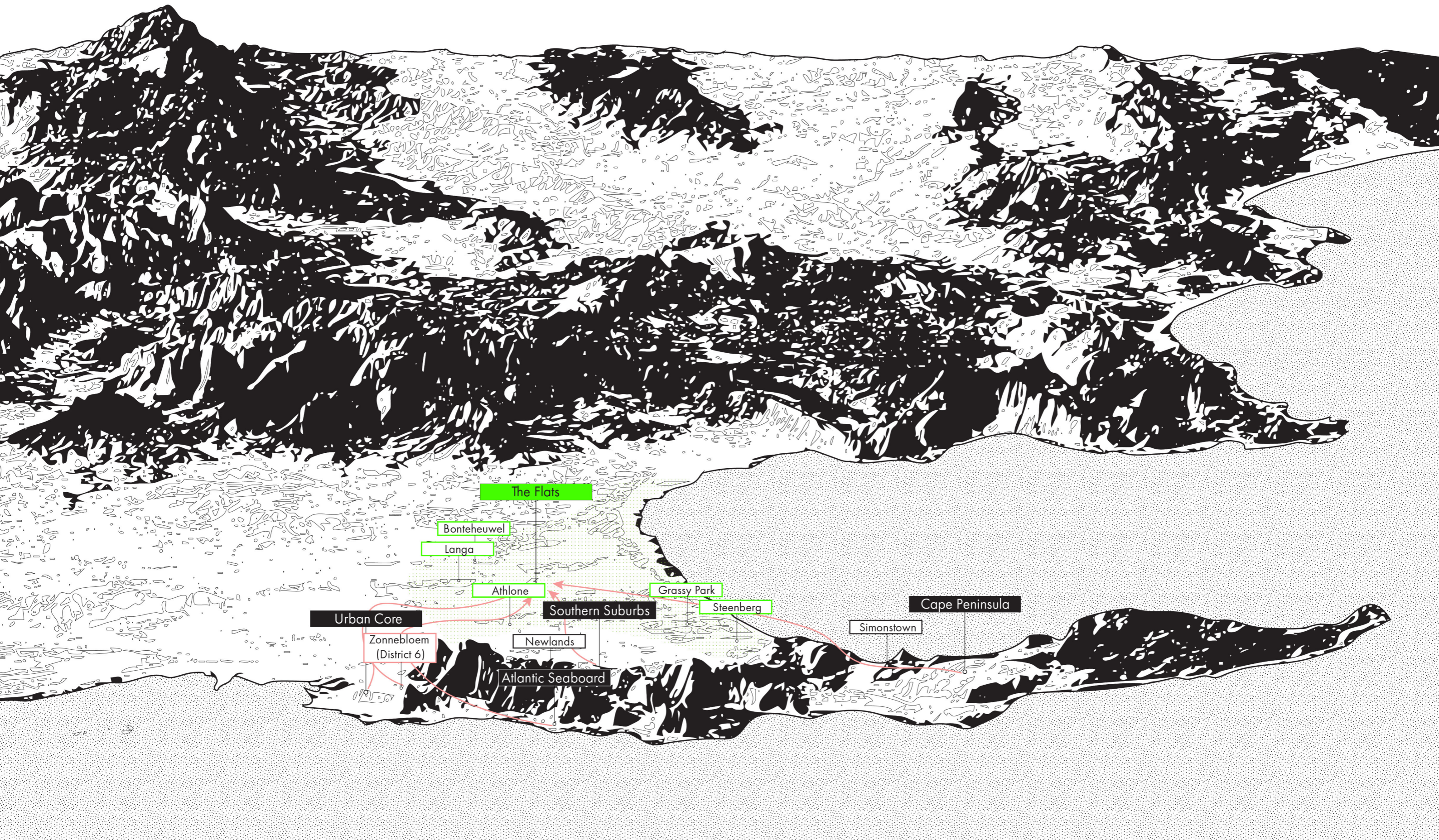
The city and its natural environment were used to make people unresponsive, invisible and silent by rendering them less able to participate in the social, cultural and political life of the city. In the Apartheid city, black bodies were not considered to be a legitimate part of the city. Their urban lives were made to be transient and temporary, slipping in and out of the city at dawn and dusk only to provide labour which the city needed to sustain it.

Under the Native Urban Areas act, implemented in 1923, black South Africans were only allowed to reside within the city if they could provide proof of employment in the city.¹⁶ The latter Group Areas Act restricted where people could live and conduct business according to their race. With this, people of colour could not participate in the central life of the city, only as transitory labour. They had to travel daily from outlying townships, separated from the inner city by natural and man-made barriers, to supply labour to the city, to which they were only as necessary as the work they could provide. In black struggle poetry from the apartheid period people are often described as "shadows" or "ghosts", only partially present.¹⁷

The City of Multiples: Segregation and the Politics of Urban Space

This invisibility and incompleteness were further enforced by the urban environments constructed to house people of colour, which lacked fragments of urbanity found in white suburbs, and in the legal restrictions that governed their actions. The segregated areas of the city became thickened boundaries, which inserted distance into the proximities of the city and the bodies that inhabited it. The contemporary city landscape that was inherited from Apartheid is one dominated by the debris of modernity and complicated by racist urban planning that was meant to separate and alienate.

Forced Removals During Apartheid



Jennifer Bedingfield describes the Apartheid city as a “city of multiples”, because of the separate cities constructed within one city. The dormitory cities of the townships were in stark contrast to the well-planned, robust white neighbourhoods. In the townships domestic properties often did not follow minimum room size and ventilation requirements found in the South African National Building regulations. Thus, apartheid planning created different living environments for people of different races (see figures 3.6-3.8). As Bedingfield writes: “Black urbanity was never eradicated, just temporarily contained behind (or concealed within) natural and human-made symbolic landscapes.”¹⁸ A parallel could be drawn between this othering of the coloured person in the city, only allowed in for their “use”, and the urban plant.¹⁹

Urban Erasure: The Forced Displacement of District Six

The forced removals that took place in District Six in the twentieth century is an important event in that it showed the violence in the methods of racist, modernist city planning of the Apartheid government and how its project failed. From District six, a mixed-race inner-city working-class area, 60 000 people were displaced to the Cape Flats.²⁰ People were displaced from a complex inner-city community (see figure 3.4) to heterogenous spaces of low architectural quality (see figure 3.5).

District six was initially settled as an expansion of the city in the seventeenth century. Its proximity to the harbour allowed for the growth of a working-class community, initially consisting of people of many different races. The area expanded rapidly in 1830 when former slaves settled there. By the nineteenth century it was a dense urban area, with a predominantly Coloured and Indian population, apart from some classified as African and white people. In 1901 with the first forced removal, most of the African inhabitants were displaced to Ndabeni, outside of the city centre. Then in 1966 with a population of around 50 000 people, District Six was proclaimed a white area under the

Group Areas Act, despite the opposition of the Cape Town city council. Forced removals started within two years of the legislation and continued into the early 1980s.²¹



Figure 3.4: Photograph of Roger street in District Six, taken in the 1950s before the forced removals.



Figure 3.5: Photograph of a typical housing block in the Cape Flats, designed by the apartheid government to house displaced people of colour. Photo taken in Atlantis by Chris Ledochowski

¹⁸ Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land - Land, Landscape and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2006).
¹⁹ Nelson Mandela, “Inaugural Speech” (May 10, 1994).

²⁰ Ernstson Henrik, “The ‘Genius of the Pagani’: Southern Urbanism, Ontological Politics and Decolonization,” (Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School, Universität Trier, 6–9 June 2017), 2017
²¹ Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land - Land, Landscape and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2006).

²² *Ibid.*
²³ Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Matters relating to the Coloured Population, 19 April 1976, quoted on the museum panels at the District Six Museum, Cape Town.

Clearing the Ground: The Political and Architectural Violence of the Group Areas Act

After the second world war, South Africa saw massive industrial growth and urban expansion. Following the example of Western governments during this period, the government was convinced that modernity was the answer to ensuring economic growth and social stability. Thus, the idea of the modern city, one where hygiene and technology rules supreme, was believed to be the solution to the pre-war city, in which different races competed for urban space and employment. The modernising agenda was accelerated by racial anxieties and became embedded in them. Modernism offered the perfect justification for political action on multi-racial areas where European residents felt threatened. International modernism supported the removal of “diseased” areas of the city” and supported a rationalised city planning approach to ameliorate social problems.

The Group Areas act was a perfect tool to achieve the vision of the modern city. In perverse modern thinking the removal of certain areas from the map of the city was seen as operations on the body that were essential to social and physical health. By the 1960s most urban planners and architects were working with a vocabulary that relied heavily on the agendas of early modern and post war planners. Through this logic, the complexity of the traditional city was to be replaced by the white city of clarity and visibility which was seen as the vision of a modern social utopia. The Group areas act enabled the clearing of the ground that would create the conditions to realise this “utopia”.²²

Report of the Commission of Enquiry into matters Relating to the Coloured Population, 19 April 1976:

“We must concentrate our first activities at the city’s centre, so that freedom of movement, accessibility and breathing space can be restored where they are vital. It is possible to achieve this radical organisation by radical methods only by a fresh start on cleared ground... This ruthless eradication directed towards a revitalising process we have, following Le Corbusier’s lead, named the Surgical Method... through surgery one must create order.”²³

In the case of District Six, shortly after the forced removals started, the residential buildings of the area were being demolished, to make way for a new ordered built environment. The land was cleared of all buildings except those with important legal status such as the churches and mosques found in the area. As seen in the Aerial photograph of 1958 (figure 3.9), before the Group Areas Act, District six was an integral and intact part of the city centre. The photograph of 1968 (figure 3.10) shows the year in which the demolitions began and shows the modernising agenda which supported the ideology of racial

The City of Multiples

Rondebosch - Southern Suburbs

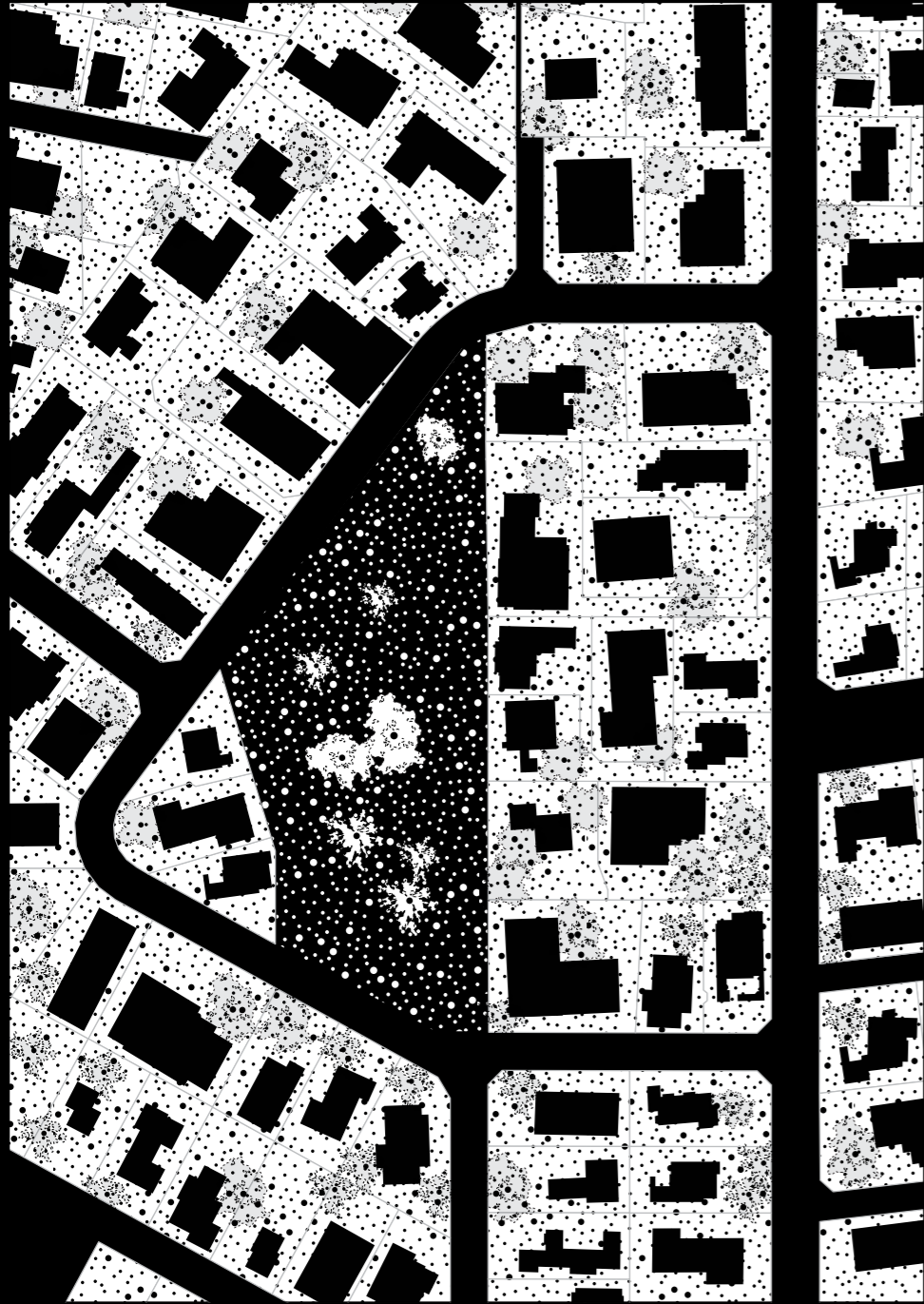


Figure 3.6: Typical housing typology in the Southern suburbs, a "whites only" area under apartheid. This drawing depicts an area in Rondebosch

Athlone - Cape Flats

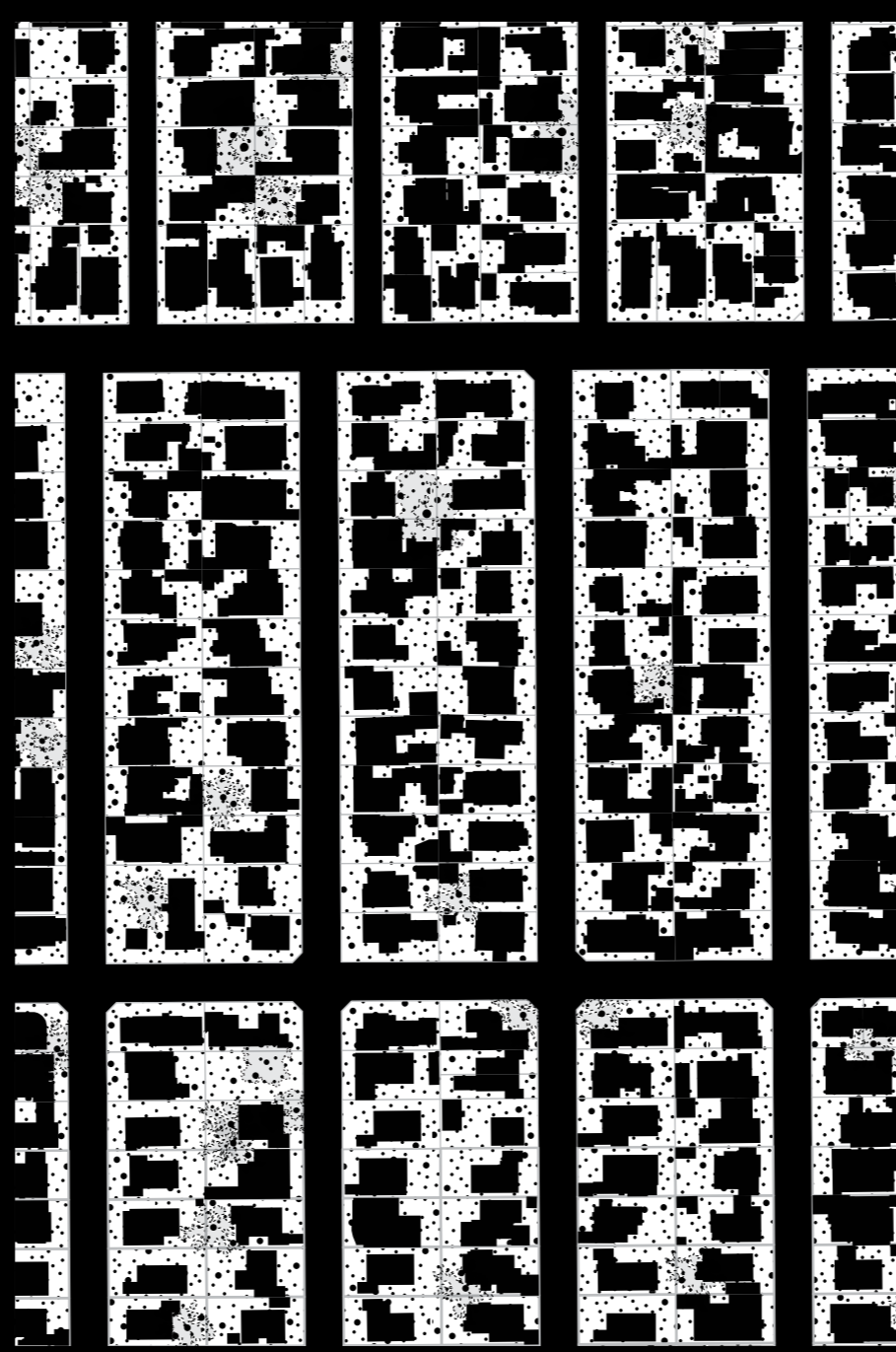


Figure 3.7: Typical housing typology in the Cape Flats, This drawing depicts an area in Athlone a "coloured" area under apartheid.

Langa - Cape Flats

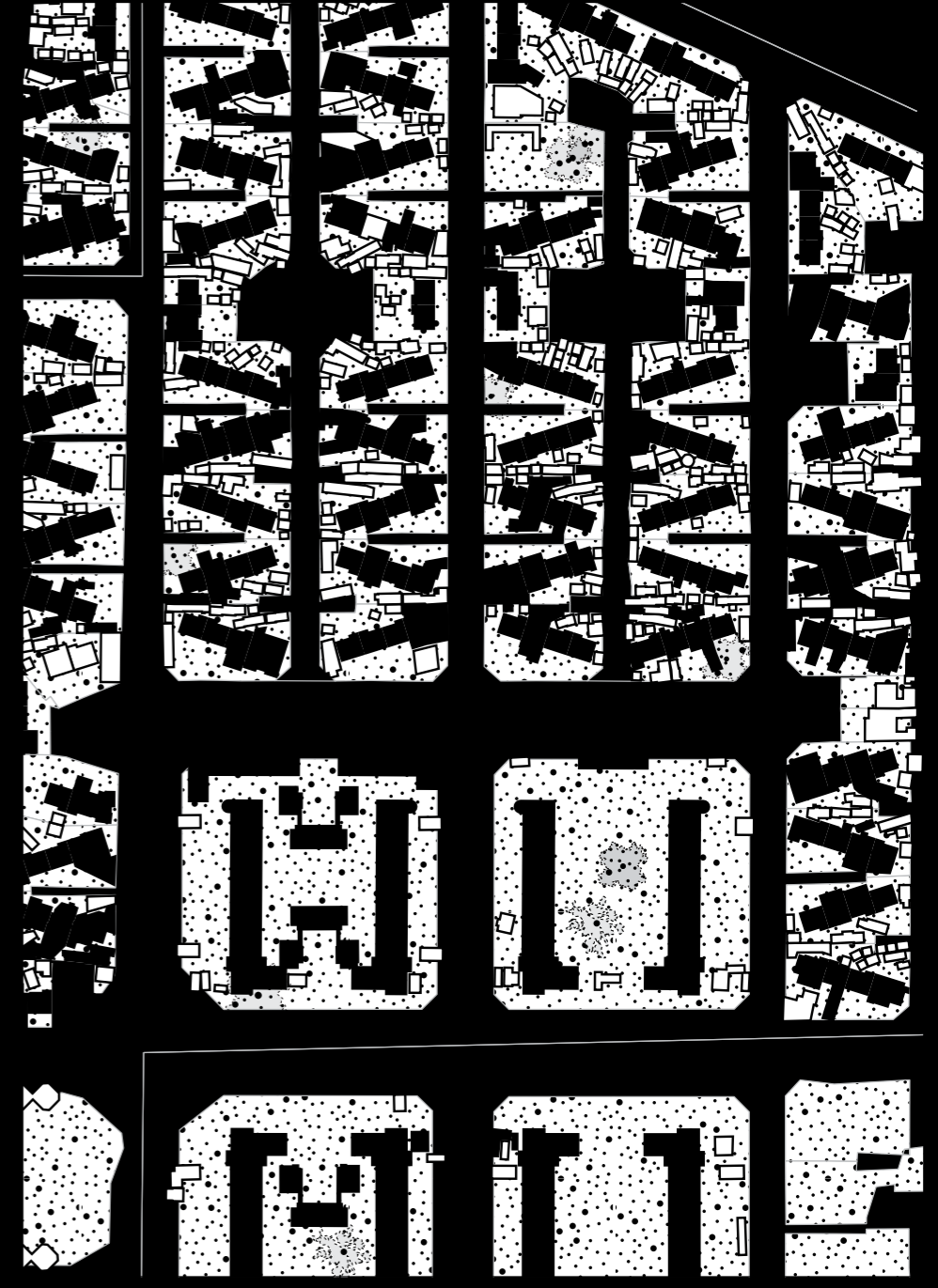


Figure 3.8: Typical housing blocks in the Cape Flats, This drawing depicts an area in Langa the oldest "African" area under apartheid.

The Demolition of District Six



Figure 3.9: Aerial photograph of Cape Town, showing the insertion of the highway through District Six, 1968.



Figure 3.10: Aerial photograph of Cape Town, before the demolition of District Six. 1958



Figure 3.11: Aerial photograph of Cape Town, showing the partial demolition of District Six, 1977.

Photographs from: Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land - Land, Landscape and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2006), 244-246

segregation. As is seen, a new four lane highway has taken space along the Western edge of the site, showing the intersection of modernist and political goals. The unwanted area of District Six was seen as a necessary casualty in the introduction of speed to the city. The photograph of 1977 shows the continuing demolitions (figure 3.11). The three photographs together, represent a moment of the physical presence of unease and uncertainty that the forced removals from District Six left on the city of Cape Town's urban fabric.

Today still, most of District Six remains vacant land, with the Cape Technikon occupying twenty-five percent of the area, and motorways and roads occupying another twenty five percent. The remaining fifty percent has remained unoccupied and uncultivated (see figures 3.12-3.14). In 2000, under the Restitution of Land Rights Act 22 of 1994 District Six was granted back to the residents who were forcibly removed.²⁴ The idea of a *tabula rasa*²⁵ of urban land has been replaced by the idea of the ground as pregnant with meaning and memory. The area has become a place where protest has overcome the modern condition. The fantasy of clean air, speed, and modernist housing slabs has been superseded by territory which has both a physical and representational presence which remains contested and ambiguous. It is a place that consists of multiple places, as it is tied to the Cape flats in inextricable ways.

Beyond Erasure: Alienation, Resistance, and the Reclamation of Cape Town's Margins

The spatial politics of alienation in Cape Town reveal the enduring legacies of apartheid-era planning, which weaponised both the built environment and natural landscapes to enforce systemic exclusion and control. Yet, by recognising the agency of more-than-human actors, such as the fynbos plants of the Cape Flats, and the resilience of displaced communities, we can begin to reimagine these spaces as sites of potential and resistance. Alienation, when reframed through a post-natural and xenofeminist lens, becomes a

tool for challenging the boundaries imposed by colonial and apartheid structures. In harnessing the frictions created by alienation, we open up possibilities for alternative urban futures in which the Cape Flats transforms from a site of historical violence to one of co-creation, resilience, and renewal. The processes of forced removals and racial segregation in Cape Town not only displaced communities but also fundamentally altered the relationship between people and the land they occupied. The Cape Flats became a space of alienation, both socially and ecologically, where displaced communities were severed from their histories, environments, and cultural ties. These acts of displacement transformed individuals into strangers in their own city, relegated to peripheral, desolate spaces that were seen as "nowhere places." (see figure 3.17)

Yet, this alienation was never complete. The resilience of displaced communities and the persistence of cultural memory resisted the erasure imposed by apartheid planning. Despite being rendered invisible, communities continued to assert their presence and identity, often through acts of protest, cultural expression, and the reoccupation of urban spaces. Similarly, the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos biome, once seen as barren and unwanted, has come to symbolize resilience and ecological richness in its ability to thrive in harsh conditions. By examining the Cape Flats through the lens of alienation, it becomes clear that this othering was not just a historical consequence of apartheid but an ongoing condition that continues to shape the socio-political and ecological landscape of Cape Town. However, alienation can also be a site of transformation. The friction created by exclusion and displacement opens up new possibilities for rethinking the urban environment as a space of co-creation between human and more-than-human actors. In recognizing the shared experiences of alienation, between displaced people and marginalized urban ecologies, we can begin to dismantle the boundaries imposed by colonial and apartheid structures.

²⁴ Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land - Land, Landscape and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2006). Pg 232.
²⁵ *Tabula rasa* (Latin for "scraped tablet" or "clean slate") refers to the philosophical concept of a blank state, often used metaphorically to describe a space, mind, or environment that is unmarked and open to inscription, change, or transformation. In urban planning, it is associated with the notion of clearing existing structures to create space for new development.



Figure 3.12: Photograph "Facing north-west across the former District Six towards Robben Island" by Jon Riordan,



Figure 3.13: Photograph "Schoolgirls enter the former District Six from Woodstock" by Jon Riordan, 2012



Figure 3.14: Photograph "Remains of a house in District Six" by Jon Riordan, 2013

This section illustrates that Cape Town's urban landscape is far from a static, finished product of apartheid planning. Instead, it is a living, contested terrain where historical violence and resilience coexist. By embracing the friction of alienation as a generative force, new forms of urban life can emerge that challenge the hierarchical boundaries of the past. Through acts of reclamation, storytelling, and ecological restoration, the Cape Flats can be reimagined as a space of resistance, resilience, and shared futures.



Figure 3.15: Photograph "A Woodstock resident on Regent Street." by Jon Riordan, 2013



Figure 3.16: Photograph "Devils Peak and razor wire." by Jon Riordan, 2013



Figure 3.17: Photography "Riyaad Hendricks leaves his home on Rhodesia Street. He has lived in the area for his entire life." by Jon Riordan, 2013

Nature as *Dispositif*

The concept of *dispositif* in Michel Foucault's work refers to a network of discourses, institutions, laws, practices, and power relations that shape and regulate behaviour, knowledge, and social order. Foucault uses *dispositif* to describe the way power is exercised through complex structures, rather than through overt domination. It's a tool of governance that subtly organizes how we think, act, and exist in the world, guiding the relationships between subjects and objects in ways that reflect the distribution of power. Foucault's *dispositif* includes not only physical institutions but also the ideas and ideologies that underpin social systems.²⁶ In this framework, nature can be understood as a *dispositif* when it is conceptualized, regulated, and instrumentalized as part of broader social, political, and economic structures. Scholars who discuss nature in this Foucauldian sense argue that nature is not just a neutral, external reality, but is deeply shaped by political and social forces.²⁷

In the case of Cape town, the natural environment, and the fynbos biome was not just a passive backdrop but employed as an active component in apartheid-era land use and segregation policies. The use of natural landscapes for socio-political ends aligns with broader trends of how landscapes have been historically used to control populations and reinforce power dynamics. Within the post-natural framework, nature is not an external entity to be managed or preserved but a participant in social, political, and ecological processes. This perspective reframes the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos and other natural elements of apartheid-era planning as co-constitutive with human and urban systems, implicated in both oppression and potential futures of justice.

Understanding nature as a *dispositif*, as a network of power and meaning, allows us

to critically interrogate the ways in which landscapes were manipulated and to imagine how they might instead be mobilized for equity and inclusion. The post-natural condition calls for recognizing the interdependencies between human and non-human actors, embracing the complexity of hybrid ecologies, and addressing the political entanglements of nature. By foregrounding plants, soils, and landscapes in urban design and planning, we can begin to unravel the legacies of exclusion and imagine new forms of coexistence that repair the ruptures of the past.

Reinforcing Boundaries: The Intersection of Ecology, Architecture, and Racism in Apartheid Planning

The spatial planning of the apartheid government placed non-white people on the urban edge. According to Pippin M. L. Anderson and Patrick J. O'Farrell, following the settler logic of urbanization as a taming of the wild and creating a more benign environment, the urban fringe is the frontier of this development and the most hostile part of the city. They write:

“there can be little confusion around the fact that apartheid spatial planning took an informed view and disadvantaged certain people by placing them in uncontrollable, untamed and difficult ecologies.”²⁸

Residents were moved from the urban city centre to the peripheral flats, where they were and still are exposed to harsh winds, floods, and large quantities of dust from the sand dunes. Furthermore, to create barriers and “safe distances” between white South Africans and their non-white neighbours, the built and natural environment was manipulated. Motorways and train lines were

²⁶ Michael Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1972), 194-197.

²⁷ Noel Castree and Bruce Braun, *Social Nature: Theory, Practice, and Politics* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

²⁸ Pippin M. L. Anderson and Patrick J. O'Farrell, “An Ecological View of the History of the City of Cape Town,” *Ecology and Society* 17, no. 3 (2012).



Figure 3.18: Photography showing a family standing in front of a sign stating that the beach was only for people classified as “white” under the apartheid government

built to create barriers between areas and green fields, sand dunes and nature reserves were strategically used to keep races apart (figures 3.19-3.21). As Ernstson writes;

“urban ecology was mobilized for racism. And “wild nature” was domesticated and shaped to serve as barriers.”²⁹

The apartheid state rendered landscapes complicit in the mechanisms of segregation and dispossession. Apartheid planning created an “orderly” and modernist-planned city that fused the natural and built environment with colonial, racist ideology. Ernstson writes:

“The city put racist discourse into physical form, and the physical form became a way to enforce racist discourse.”³⁰

Aesthetic Nature as Belonging to the Privileged in Apartheid Planning

Landscape was not only used as barriers but was also seen as a valuable resource, belonging only to the privileged minority. Under the Group Areas Act views of the mountain and sea were increasingly reserved for those classified as “white” (figure whites only beach). In the removals at District Six views of the landscape played a massive role in the decision to reserve the area for white users. In an excerpt from the Cape Times, from 1969, the secretary of Community Development wrote: “With a view to its special situation on the slopes of Table Mountain, the beautiful view and the attractive scenery... [t]he best contribution which can be demanded from the area in the interests of community development is the establishment of economic housing of a relatively high standard therein.”³¹ The landscape of District six had both aesthetic and economic value. This economic motivation inserted the concept of nature as a picturesque backdrop for life into legislation.

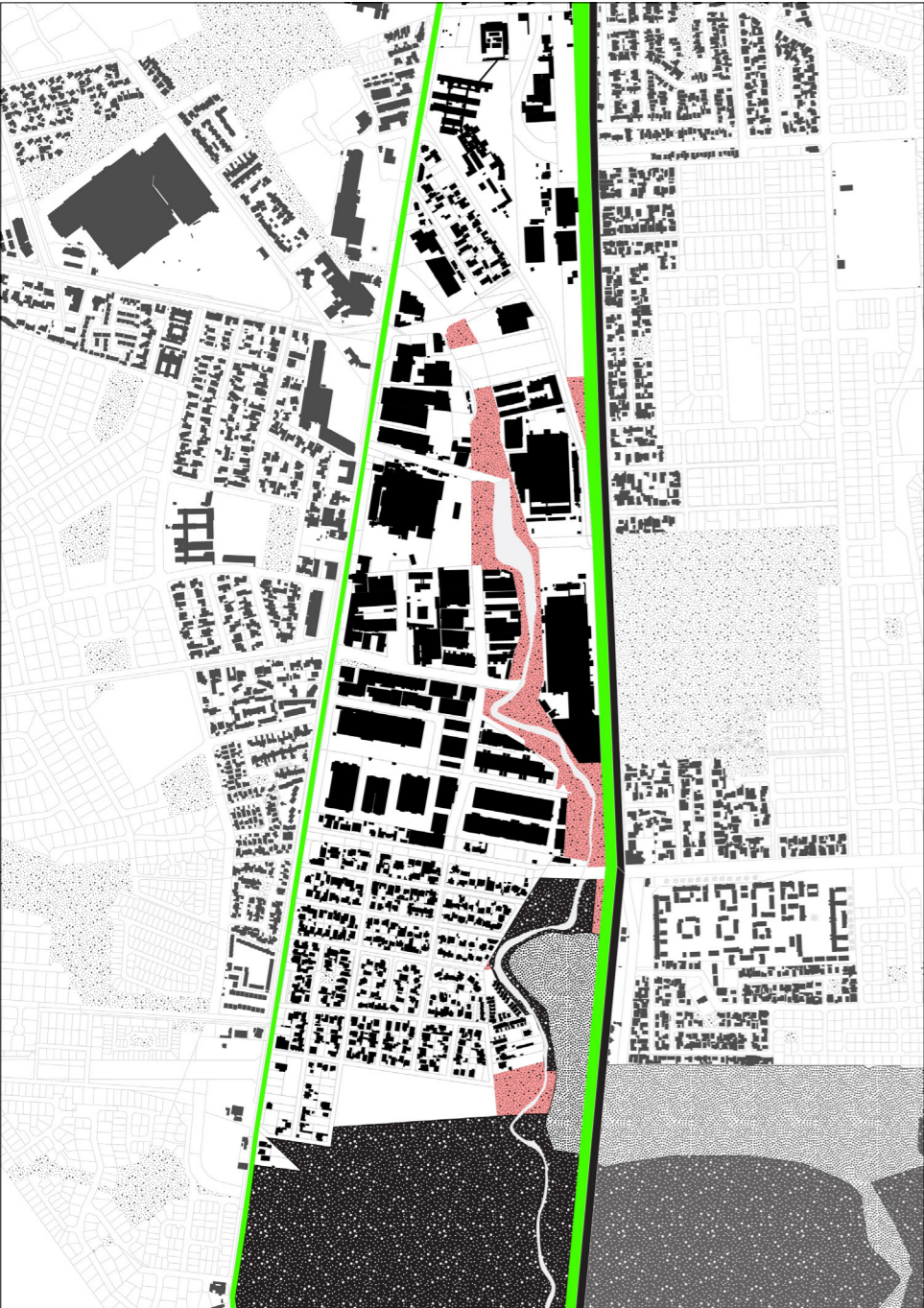
²⁹ Ernstson Henrik, “The ‘Genius of the Pagan’: Southern Urbanism, Ontological Politics and Decolonization,” (Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School, Universität Trier, 6–9 June 2017), 2017.

³⁰ Ernstson Henrik, “Re-Translating Nature in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Material Semiotics of People and Plants at Bottom Road,” ed. Heeks Richard, *Actor-Network Theory for Development: Working Paper Series, Paper 4/2013*. (2013), 31

³¹ Statement by J. Niemand, Secretary of Community Development in the Cape Times, 10 January 1969, cited in Hart, Deborah (1990) “Political manipulation of urban space”, in Jeppie, S. and Soudien, C. (eds) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, Cape Town: Buchu Books, p. 124.

The Spatial Legacy of Apartheid Planning Buffer Zones

Kirstenhof | Steenberg



Rondebosch | Athlone



| Langa |

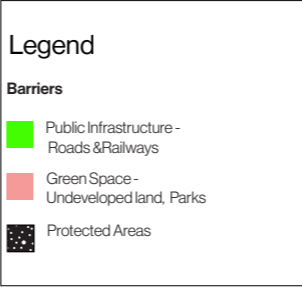
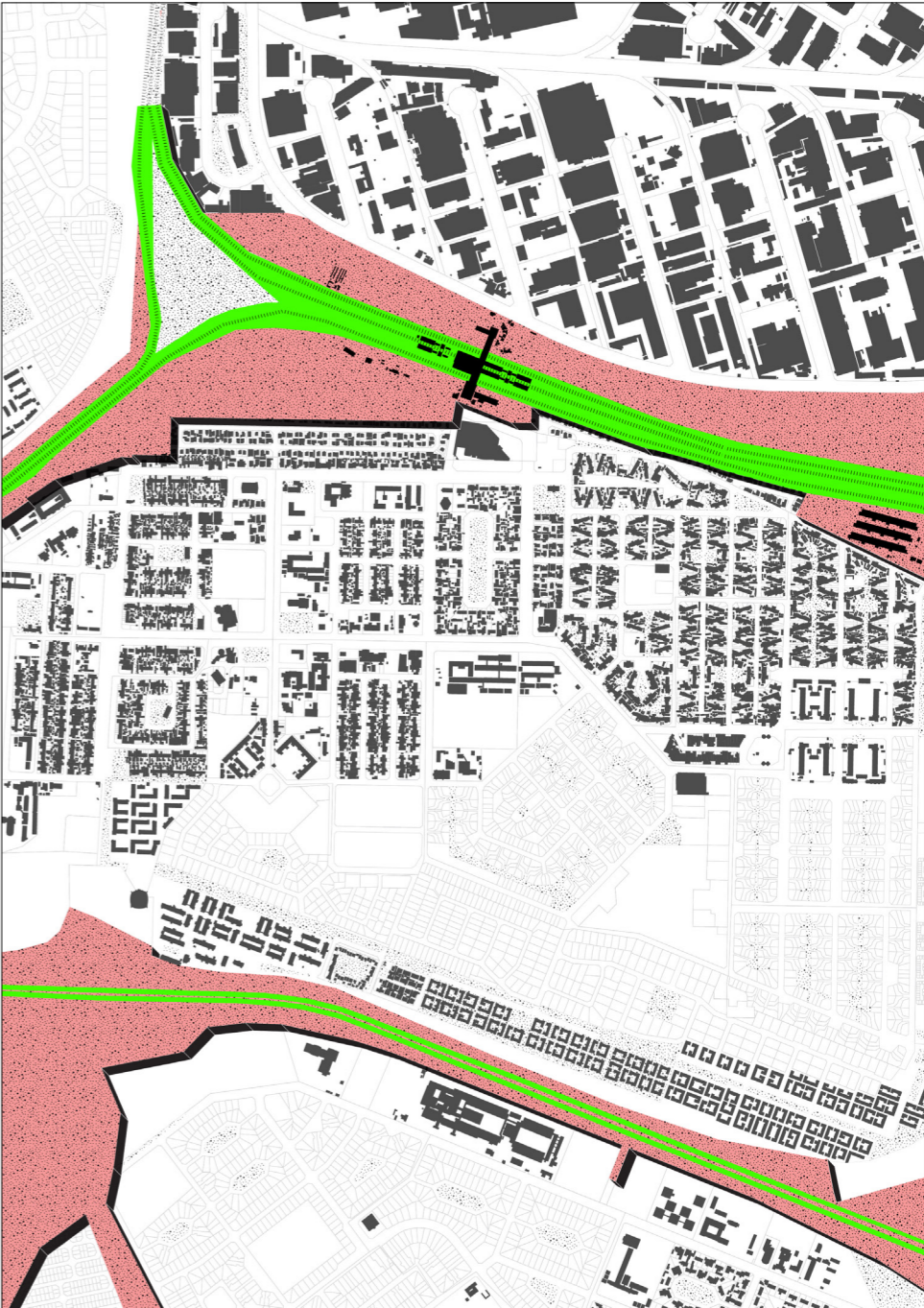
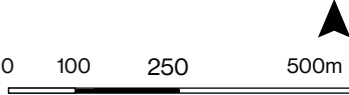


Figure 3.19: The Cape Flats area of Steenberg is physically separated from Kirstenhof through a buffer zone consisting of the Sandvlei conservation area to the South and the Sandvlei river, brownfield sites and industrial buildings to the North. The buffer zone is bordered by the M3 highway to the East and another main road to the West

Figure 3.20: The affluent area of Rondebosch is separated from the Cape Flats area of Athlone by a buffer zone consisting of the M3 highway, bordered by undeveloped, abandoned and degraded green spaces

Figure 3.21: Langa, The oldest township in Cape Town is surrounded by apartheid planned barriers. The Railway and a vast expanse of undeveloped land, much of which now contain informal settlement, creates a barrier to the North, while the N2 Highway and its bordering undeveloped land acts as a buffer zone in the South and Public roads border the township to the East and West



Forced Removals and the Loss of Connection to Place

For the residents of District Six the view of the mountain and the sea was an important aspect of their connection to the city. In an interview one former resident said:

“I was very passionate about District Six because you looked one way and you saw Table Mountain and you looked the other way and you saw the sea, and then I was forced to go to a place where I couldn’t see anything”³²

Other oral histories collected from the 1980s and 90s attest to the value the external landscape had for former residents. The spaces to which people of colour were displaced were often described as the negative of their previous homes, where complexity was replaced with monotony, well-constructed buildings with poorly made shells and spectacular views with undifferentiated horizons.³³ A comparison of the old Newlands community and the new space of Bonteheuwel was given as follows:

“There was anger among people who will have to pull up their roots and move from an area where they have lived all their lives. They will have to leave the community in which they feel they belong and start all over again somewhere else . . . They say there can be no comparison in terms of comfort and pleasant surroundings between the well-established little Newlands community, green in the shadow of the mountains, and the brash, new, expanding Bonteheuwel where the houses are alike and the roads are narrow strips of concrete bordered by the fine Flats sand.”³⁴

A recurring theme in the discussions around the removals was that of “rootedness” and “roots”. This language juxtaposed the Apartheid discourse that labelled people of colour as “unnatural” in the city, with a language of belonging and growth over time in the depths of the contested soil.³⁵ Another description of a forced removal, this one from

Simonstown, refers to the city that remains as one filled with the ghosts of those removed:

“Now they are to have their very roots torn out of their native soil. Nothing can ever replace a lost home with all its memories and associations. When the dread time comes for them all to go, it will be a town of unhappy ghosts, haunted by those who have been so callously ejected from the homes and land of their forefathers.”³⁶

In these descriptions, the green, picturesque landscape of mountain and ocean is often portrayed as providing residents with a sense of place and belonging, while the perceived barrenness and infertility of the Cape Flats evoke feelings of displacement and homelessness. Urban removals had comparable effects on perceptions of vegetation and landscape as those observed in rural settings. For those uprooted, the loss of recognizable places represented a dual mourning for both community and place. Cultivation and familiar landscapes symbolized prolonged presence on a site, fostering a deep sense of home and connection. It is in this loss of connection to place, that can be found at the root of the disengagement with the Fynbos of the flats.

The legacy of these apartheid territories lingers in contemporary Cape Town. The “empty” spaces of District Six, the social and environmental challenges of the Cape Flats, and the inaccessibility of prime urban land reflect an enduring spatial inequality rooted in historical injustices. However, these landscapes are also spaces of resistance, memory, and potential reconciliation. The persistence of vacant land in District Six, for example, symbolizes both the violence of the apartheid past and the possibility of a future that reimagines these spaces as sites of justice and inclusion. Similarly, the Cape Flats, despite its environmental challenges, holds the potential for reclamation and regeneration, where human and more-than-human might coexist in ways that address historical wrongs

³² Mrs Fortune, former resident of District Six, quoted by Chris McGreal, ‘Time to go home for Cape Town’s refugees’, *Guardian newspaper*, 17 May 2001, p. 21.

³³ This is despite the fact that townships were initially modelled on the garden city, with vegetation and gardens as an intrinsic part of their conception. See Japha, Derek (1995) ‘The social programme of the modern movement’, in Judin, Hilton and Vladislavic, Ivan (eds) *Blank: Architecture, Apartheid and After*, Rotterdam: NAI, pp. 423–437.

³⁴ Unknown author (1964) ‘Let the immigrants go to Bonteheuwel’, *Contact*, 7(2), 24 January.

³⁵ Jennifer Beningfield, *The Frightened Land - Land, Landscape and Politics in South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Routledge, 2006). Pg 232.

³⁶ Willis, Barbara (1967) ‘The death knell of Old Simon’s Town’, *The Black Sash*, November, pp. 25–28.



Figure 3.22: Photograph depicting the remnants of a protest by ancestors of the indigenous Khoisan people in the vacant land of the old District Six "Hut built by Khoi protesters" by Jon Riordan, 2013



Figure 3.22: Photograph of two young girls dancing in the streets of one of the Cape Flats' most notorious gang areas, Manenberg. Photo by Sarah Stacke as part of her series on life in the Cape Flats

Plant Politics in the Neo-Colonial City

Urban spaces, particularly those shaped by colonial histories, are complex ecological and political terrains where the boundaries between nature, culture, and politics are often contested and fluid. In Cape Town, the politics of plants are inextricably linked to a history of settler colonialism, environmental exploitation, and racialised power structures. Plants, as both active participants in ecological processes and symbols of cultural significance, occupy a unique space in the politics of urban nature. The relationship between human society and plants in this context is not merely one of aesthetic appreciation or environmental conservation but is deeply embedded in the socio-political fabric of the city. From the erasure of indigenous botanical knowledge to the colonial shaping of botanical gardens, plants are implicated in the formation of identities, power relations, and environmental narratives that persist into the present day. This section examines the role of plants in the political and social construction of Cape Town, exploring the colonial durability embedded in botanical knowledge and conservation practices, and the ongoing struggle for the decolonization of urban spaces and ecological practices.

To my compatriots, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld.

Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal. The national mood changes as the seasons change.

We are moved by a sense of joy and exhilaration when the grass turns green and the flowers bloom.”

– Nelson Mandela, “Inaugural Speech” (May 10, 1994).

Botanical Colonial Durabilities

This section explores the persistence of colonial structures within urban ecology, particularly in the realm of botany, and how these histories are carried through institutional frameworks, methodologies, and cultural assumptions. The discussion highlights the role of colonial botany in shaping the city’s environmental knowledge, from the naming of indigenous flora to the cultural alienation embedded in colonial institutions

like Kirstenbosch. By examining the entangled histories of plants and their human associations, this section seeks to open up possibilities for decolonizing urbanism through the recognition of local, indigenous, and marginalized ways of knowing.

Epistemic Colonialism - Who’s in the know?

The question of who is in the know when it comes to urban nature in Cape Town, needs to be investigated. This question reveals opportunities to decolonize urbanism by focusing on specific locations and contexts.³⁷ The origins of theory has been at the heart of both feminist and post-colonial critique of Western thought with scholars such as Chakrabarty³⁸ and Edward Said³⁹ exploring how theory travels, the sources of its authority, and how it has succeeded in making certain things visible and others invisible. Post-colonial studies increasingly challenge the Western, colonial principles historically used to interpret cities and urbanization. A central tenet of this critique is that all theories carry local assumptions, embedded in the methods, institutional frameworks, and cultural contexts of their creators. Recognizing these assumptions enables the development of situated and pluralistic understandings of the urban condition. These assumptions are carried through researchers through ways of thinking, methods that they have been taught and institutions to which they belong. Recognizing these assumptions enables the development of situated and pluralistic understandings of the urban condition.⁴⁰ Henrik Ernstson’s concept of *the genius of the local* in Cape Town provides a framework for recovering forgotten and silenced histories



Figure 3.23: Painting of Carl Thunberg in Special Dress, 1776

37 Ernstson Henrik, “The ‘Genius of the Pagan’: Southern Urbanism, Ontological Politics and Decolonization,” (Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School, Universität Trier, 6–9 June 2017), 2017.

38 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

39 Edward W Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic*. (Harvard University Press, 1983).

40 Mary Lawhon et al, “Unlearning (Un) Located Ideas in the Provincialization of Urban Theory,” *Regional Studies* 50, no. 9 (May 4, 2016): 1611–22.

41 Ernstson Henrik, “The ‘Genius of the Pagan’: Southern Urbanism, Ontological Politics and Decolonization,” (Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School, Universität Trier, 6–9 June 2017), 2017.

and ways of knowing. These efforts foster new platforms of engagement, where the city can be reimagined in entangled ways. By disrupting old dichotomies, nature/city, urban/rural, machine/organism, new political possibilities emerge, enabling the practical decolonization of urbanism.⁴¹

In Ernstson's essay "Urban Plants and Colonial Durabilities" in *The Botanical City*⁴², he recalls a meeting on Table Mountain with a former fynbos guide from Kirstenbosch botanical garden, in which she gives him a short lecture about Swedish botanist Carl Thunberg, who she calls: "the Father of South African Botany." She informed Ernstson that Thunberg arrived at the Fort of the Dutch East India Company in Cape Town in 1772, to learn Dutch and "discover" three hundred Erica flowers⁴³ only to leave South Africa to then become the father of Japanese botany as well.⁴⁴ This statement by the former guide eradicates any pre-colonial, indigenous plant-knowledge and dubs a Swede, who spent three years of his eighty five on Earth in Cape Town, as the main authority on the area's botanical knowledge. This encounter begs one to ask: what colonial durabilities within urban ecology and urban environmental knowledge remain today?

Colonial Botany and Urban Ecology

Modern urban ecology emerged in West Berlin in the late 1950's with Herbert Sukopp or possibly in Paris in the 1930's with Paul Jovet, from which it spread rapidly to major cities in Europe and the USA in the 1990s and formed part of the "complex systems" body of theory that strived to consolidate a planetary knowledge project for urban sustainability, that urban ecology represents today.⁴⁵ However, a critique of this project is the lack of acknowledgement of the hegemonic nature of botany that has been influenced by colonial and imperial sciences and became constituted within expanding European powers, settler colonial societies and racial capitalism.⁴⁶ Botany as an imperial science has been increasingly studied by historians. This has included how political concepts such as race relate to botany.⁴⁷



Figure 3.24: The earliest known botanical drawing of the Fynbos plant the Night Scented Geranium, 1635.

42 Henrik Ernstson, "Urban Plants and Colonial Durabilities," in *The Botanical City*, ed. Matthew Gandy and Sandra Jasper (Berlin: Jovis, 2020).

43 From the Fynbos family Ericaceae.

44 Quotes can be found 22 minutes and 22 seconds into the film "One Table Two Elephants" (Von Heland and Ernstson, 2018). Carl Thunberg published several major works, including *Flora Capensis* 1807, and *Flora Japonica* 1784.

45 See: Henrik Ernstson and Sverker Sörlin, "Toward Comparative Urban Environmentalism," in *Grounding Urban Natures: Histories and Futures of Urban Ecologies*, eds. Henrik Ernstson and Sverker Sörlin (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 3–53. Where the authors reference: Herbert Sukopp, "On

the Early History of Urban Ecology in Europe," in *Preslia, Praha* 74 (2002), 373–393; Jens Lachmund, *Greening Berlin: The Co-Production of Science, Politics and Urban Nature* (London and Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013); and Matthew Gandy, "Marginalia: aesthetics, ecology, and urban wastelands," in *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 103 (2013), 1301–1316. Sukopp (2002, 374) points out much earlier examples of urban botany with floral studies of ruins and walls in Rome, Poitiers, Palestine, and Algeria.

46 Henrik Ernstson, "Urban Plants and Colonial Durabilities," in *The Botanical City*, ed. Matthew Gandy and Sandra Jasper (Berlin: Jovis, 2020).

47 See for instance "Linnaeus' simplistic '[skin]-colour scheme' of 'human varieties' from 1735. As demonstrated by Müller-Wille,

Linnaeus main preoccupation was with plants, but he refined and reworked his scheme on "human varieties" throughout his life, while being notoriously unclear on who and what he based his scheme on. See: Staffan Müller-Wille, "Linnaeus and the four corners of the world," in *The Cultural Politics of Blood, 1500–1900*, eds. K.A. Coles, R. Bauer, Z. Nunes, and C.L. Peterson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 191–209.

48 Londa L. Schiebinger, *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce, and Politics in the Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University Of Pennsylvania Press, Cop, 2005).

49 See: Michael Simpson and Jen Bagelman, "Decolonizing Urban Political Ecologies: The Production of Nature in Settler Colonial Cities," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108, no. 2 (December 18, 2017): 558–68; and Marnie Graham, "Postcolonial Nature Conservation in Practice: The Everyday Challenges of On-Ground Urban Nature Conservation, Cape Town, South Africa," *GeoJournal* 82, no. 1 (August 22, 2015): 43–62. For specific focus on Cape Town see: Lance Van Sittert, "The Intimate Politics of the Cape Floral Kingdom," *South African Journal of Science* 106, no. 3/4 (April 13, 2010).

50 See for example: W. Harvey, *Flora Capensis: Being a Systematic Description of the Plants of the Cape Colony, Caffraria and Port Natal* (Dublin, 1859–65); and H. Bolus, "Sketch of the Flora of South Africa," in J. Noble (ed.), *The Official Handbook of the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town, 1886), pp. 286–317.

51 Cheryl McEwan, "Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023): 1114–37.

52

Ibid.

53 Ben-Erik Van Wyk, Bosch Van Oudtshoorn, and Nigel Gericke, *Medicinal Plants of South Africa* (Pretoria: Briza Publications, 2009).

54 Premesh Lal, *The Deaths of Hints* (HSRC Publishers, 2009).

55 Ann Laura Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

56 Premesh Lal, *The Deaths of Hints* (HSRC Publishers, 2009).

conservation processes which highlight how botany has always been inextricably tied to exploited indigenous knowledge.⁴⁹

Colonial Renaming, Indigenous Knowledge, and the Politics of Natural Heritage

The use of the word "Fynbos", an Afrikaans word that translates directly to fine bush, to refer to the indigenous plants of the South-Western Cape of South Africa is as recent as the 1960s. In the nineteenth century the vegetation was called "Cape Flora" which was used by early naturalists. It is interesting to note that the naming of the plants coincides with the political history of South Africa, as the country became a British colony in 1806, and then a republic 1961, when the Afrikaans Apartheid government came into power, thus showing how plants through their names have been intertwined in human politics. Fynbos was also established as the official name at precisely the time when international demand for Cape Flora⁵⁰ began to rise leading to a national association to market them.⁵¹ At the same time Fynbos is dubbed by politicians as a "natural asset" and "treasure-chest" and botanists began to call for its conservation as a unique biome type. Fynbos thus emerged as a unique and uniquely threatened natural heritage at a particular cultural moment in the history of South Africa and the historical



Figure 3.24: The buchu fynbos plant is an important plant in khoisan healing practice and cosmology

development of global capitalism in which there was a formation of transnational markets and subnational identities, cultures and ecologies.⁵²

The process of (re-)naming and classifying plants needs to be added to the lists of colonial violences, that destroyed much of indigenous knowledge of the San and Khoikhoi people who inhabited the Cape for thousands of years prior to the arrival of European settlers. According to ethnobotanical research done with people of indigenous ascent, fynbos has been used since the later stone age for its medicinal and nutritional values, as medicines, salves and food sources. Examples include the use of the Protea Repens as a source of carbohydrates and as a remedy for chest disorders; Protea Caffra for stomach ulcers and Buchu, one of the Khoisan's most important herbs as an antiseptic treatment for wounds, a medicine for stomach, bladder and bowel issues, and even a tonic for youth.⁵³

The Settler Public Sphere

In the settler colony of Cape town in the 18th century, botany became enmeshed in white elite and middle-class associations and hobbies, with remnants of colonial social relations and imaginaries still conditioning how urban nature in the city is known, conceived of and engaged with. The notion of a "settler public sphere"⁵⁴, theorised by African historian Premesh Lamu outlines how the residues of racism and colonialism is still present in Cape Town today in a way similar to the "colonial patina"⁵⁵ of Stoler. The settler public sphere is found in physical and territorial forms such as in cities but also in epistemic forms, that have developed a way of knowing the world where white settlers were the only ones given the agency of thought and knowing. The narratives of colonial pasts, the silent distinctions they still cue, their affective charged and the implicit lessons they mobilize are so invisibly woven into the fabric of everyday urban life that Lamu describes them as simultaneously being "everywhere and nowhere at all"⁵⁶.

As an example of these implicit colonial durabilities, a conversation that Ernstson relates in his paper, on actor network theory can be given. Ernstson attended a ceremony at the Kirstenbosch National Garden where Kelvin Cochrane, one of his research informants/friends was to receive recognition for his community-run Fynbos conservation project in the Flats. Ernstson relates Cochrane's words to him moments before receiving his accolades: "Last time I was here they would not let me in because I was not white. And see today, the only coloured⁵⁷ people here are those serving us."⁵⁸ Cochrane's relation to the world-renowned Kirstenbosch botanical gardens is laced with hidden tensions. As environmental historian Lance van Sittert critically developed in his work, the Kirstenbosch botanical garden and its building that was constructed so beautifully along the foothills of Table mountain in 1913 represents a physical manifestation of the codification of the home and sanctity of elite and middle-class British white families.⁵⁹ The residue or patina that sits on botany, is complicit in the hidden violence felt by a man who falls outside of the settler colonial sphere. Botany, as imperial science, has no resistance or taxonomic distinction to make between plants that grow among the historically advantaged/oppressed. Thus, it suited the settler colony because it posed a cultural code that was incapable of realising the violence and oppression on which it was founded, and it is the durability of this cultural quality of "muteness"⁶⁰ towards racial and capital injustice that is still seen in debates about urban biodiversity conservation in Cape Town, today.

Henrik Ernstson writes that the botanic city cannot simply be a city full of plants or a city where plant life is taken more seriously, it must also acknowledge how it underwrites a racialized order of the city.⁶¹ In another conversation with Ernstson, Cochrane says: "Our people⁶² can't afford to go to Kirstenbosch. No, and why should they, is the question I ask. I've always said to them we need to create more Kirstenbosches. Don't come tell me there's Kirstenbosch. We need to bring that people or the reserves

closer to the people. Let them interact and let them find that peace and tranquillity.⁶³ This quote speaks to the still inaccessibility of the botanical garden to poorer Capetonians⁶⁴. Cochrane's solution to this is creating spaces where urban nature in the Cape flats can allow multi-species flourishing between CFSF and their companions in historic oppression.

The Limits of Inclusion: Decolonizing the Botanical Garden

In Cape Town it is important to recognise the geography of difference imbedded in the city due to its colonial and apartheid past. Kirstenbosch, as a world-renowned botanical garden did not appear in a vacuum outside of politics. The garden was built in 1913 on a territory shaped by thousands of years of indigenous presence followed by colonial violence in settler, forestry and agricultural practice. At the time of its construction, the purpose of the garden was to serve the development of the newly established union of South Africa, through the promotion of the imperial science of botany and to foster a sense of belonging among white citizens. Throughout its existence, the garden has centred around Western knowledge systems, rendering it culturally alienating. Plants are displayed as passive objects of science, ordered according to taxonomic and phytogeographic criteria, labelled with their Latin names for humans to observe (see figure 3.25). Historically common English and Afrikaans names were included with no mention of indigenous cosmologies or epistemologies.

After the 1994 elections, the new government called for the transformation of museums and institutions to serve a newly founded democratic society, whilst botanical gardens were seen as apolitical entities and were left out of this decree. This, in itself, comments on the lack of recognition plants and their multi-species, political entanglements beget. However, a suggestion that did filter into the vegetal realm was the introduction of muthi (medicine)⁶⁵ gardens into botanical gardens, to showcase the traditional African uses of plants, with the first of these

57 Historically used under apartheid to classify the mixed-race people that were creole descendants of the Khoi, San, Europeans, and enslaved peoples, from Malaysia, West Africa and Madagascar. Today it is used as a proud term by these communities, who identify as coloured.
58 Conversation between Kelvin Cochrane and Henrik Ernstson in: Henrik Ernstson, "Re-Translating Nature in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Material Semiotics of People and Plants at Bottom Road," ed. Richard Heeks, *Actor-Network Theory for Development: Working Paper Series*, Paper 4/2013. (2013). 59
Lance Van Sittert, "The Intimate Politics of the Cape Floral Kingdom," *South African Journal of Science* 106, no. 3/4 (April 13, 2010).
60 Henrik Ernstson, "Re-Translating Nature in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Material Semiotics of People and Plants at Bottom Road," ed. Richard Heeks, *Actor-Network Theory for Development: Working Paper Series*, Paper 4/2013. (2013).
61 Henrik Ernstson, "Urban Plants and Colonial Durabilities," in *The Botanical City*, ed. Matthew Gandy and Sandra Jasper (Berlin: Jovis, 2020).
62 Here Cochrane refers to members of the grassy park community, who are predominantly coloured people whose forebears were forcefully removed from inner city areas like District six to the Cape Flats, and are still living in conditions of poverty and segregation.
63 Taken from a conversation between Henrik Ernstson and Mikey, a baker from grassy park found in: Henrik Ernstson, "Re-Translating Nature in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Material Semiotics of People and Plants at Bottom Road," ed. Richard Heeks, *Actor-Network Theory for Development: Working Paper Series*, Paper 4/2013. (2013).
64 Currently the cost for South African citizens to enter the Kirstenbosch Botanical garden is R100, which equates to roughly the amount you would pay for seven loaves of bread.
65 *Muthi* is a term for traditional Southern African medicines and healing practices that use natural products, such as plants, animals, and minerals. Muthi medicine is practiced from South Africa as far North as Lake Tanganyika. The word comes from the Zulu/Xhosa/Northern Ndebele word *umuthi*, which means "tree" or "medicine".



Figure 3.26: Plant label at Kirstenbosch, with only the Latin name



Figure 3.27: The traditional Xhosa/Mpondo hut in the Useful Plants Garden showcases African and indigenous artifacts crafted from local plants. It plays a crucial role in highlighting both African botanical knowledge and practices, as well as the historical presence of Black people at Kirstenbosch.

66 1. *Izangoma* and 2. *amagqirha* are the names given to 1. Zulu and 2. Xhosa traditional healers/diviners. They are spiritual intermediaries who communicate with ancestors to diagnose and heal spiritual or physical ailments, often using rituals and herbal remedies. 3. *Izinyanga* are herbalists in Zulu culture who specialize in the knowledge and preparation of medicinal plants. Unlike *izangoma*, they typically do not act as diviners but focus on treating physical illnesses with herbal remedies derived from extensive traditional plant knowledge. 4. Khoisan shamans are spiritual mediators and healers who play a vital role in maintaining the balance between their communities and the natural world. They enter trance states during rituals to access spiritual realms, perform healing, and gain guidance, often drawing on extensive knowledge of medicinal plants and ecological systems.
67 Melanie Boehi and Phakamani m'Afrika Xaba, "Decolonising Kirstenbosch: Confronting the Violent Past of South Africa's Botanical Gardens," *The Architectural Review*, January 28, 2021.

gardens being established in 1997 in the KwaZulu Natal National Botanical Garden in Pietermaritzburg.

The Useful Plants Garden

In 2002, the Useful Plants Garden was planted at Kirstenbosch Garden. The garden includes 150 species which are categorised according to their use. *Izangoma/ amagqirha* and *izinyanga* (healers) and shamans⁶⁶ were consulted in the development of the project. In an important gesture, African names were added to the English and Afrikaans names in this garden. Furthermore, the structure that was built stands in stark contrast to the colonial style of the other Kirstenbosch buildings (see figure 3.27). Boehi and Xara writes:

“it (the hut) speaks more powerfully than any of the other architectural additions of ideas, imaginations, hauntings and possibilities for rooting a decolonial botanical garden at Kirstenbosch.”⁶⁷

It is modelled on the building style of the amaMpondo people of the Eastern Cape, in wattle and daub design, with a structure of woven branches and a mixture of mud and cow dung as binder. It was developed in a communal way with master craftsman, u Tata Zanazo, leading the design (see figure 3.26). After the construction was completed, school children of Xhosa decent were invited to participate in adding the finishes. For many of these children who grew up in Cape Town, it was their first encounter with traditional Xhosa architecture. Thus, actively becoming a building around which a new community could emerge.

While the addition of the Useful Plants Garden and hut are an important step to

the recognition of non-Western botanical knowledge, it does still perpetuate colonial practices by putting African and Indigenous plant knowledge on display as an “exhibition space” separate from the rest of the still colonially ordered Kirstenbosch. As a critique, Boehi and Xara further comment that the hut, as a distinctly cultural display in a natural history setting: “connects to an archive of colonial ethnography, imperial exhibitions and the human zoo.” Furthermore, on information boards the African knowledge and technologies are framed as “ancient” and “forgotten” methods, implying a development from these practices into modern Western medicine.

This exploration of Cape Town’s urban nature and its entanglements with colonial histories and epistemologies underscores the urgent need to decolonize both ecological and urban frameworks. The persistence of colonial durabilities in botany, conservation, and urban ecology highlights how Western knowledge systems have long silenced alternative ways of knowing and being. While initiatives such as the Useful Plants Garden at Kirstenbosch offer glimpses of decolonial possibilities, their positioning as isolated displays reinforces the structures they aim to challenge. To truly decolonize urban nature, we must disrupt the dichotomies of modernity, nature/culture, urban/rural, and tradition/progress, embracing entangled histories and pluralistic epistemologies. Efforts like Kelvin Cochrane’s vision of accessible, community-centred urban nature challenge the hegemonic paradigms of both botany and urbanism. By centring indigenous knowledge and lived experiences within urban spaces, we can create platforms for genuine multi-species flourishing. Decolonizing urban ecology in Cape Town, and beyond, requires not only acknowledging these embedded colonial residues but actively reimagining our engagements with the more-than-human, landscapes, urban space and each other in ways that foster equity and coexistence.

Fynbos, Biopolitics, and Conservation

The discourse concerning fynbos in Cape Town intersects with histories of biopolitics. Michel Foucault’s concept of *biopolitics*, that describes the management of life and populations as a central strategy of modern governance, illuminates how conservation efforts are often implicated in systems of control.⁶⁸ In colonial and post-colonial contexts, biopolitical interventions have historically merged with environmental policies to regulate human and non-human lives. In current urban nature discourse in Cape Town there is a lack of addressing the “imbalance” after Apartheid. The ontological politics of the dominating view on what urban nature is, does not accept that Fynbos is entangled in an apartheid history, because it does not accept the entanglement of nature and culture. In this view, nature is kept at a safe distance from people and culture in controlled nature reserves, studied through computer screens and scientific methods.⁶⁹ The question begs to be asked: Fynbos has long been framed as a natural heritage, but for who?

Unequal Landscapes

The Cape Flats are a socio-ecologically marginalized region within the fynbos biome that exemplifies the intersections of conservation, urban development, and inequality. The Flats are often portrayed as a barren and degraded space, reflecting what Achille Mbembe describes as a “necropolitical logic”, which he explains as the abandonment of certain spaces and populations to structural violence and neglect.⁷⁰ This narrative contrasts sharply with the valorisation of fynbos as a symbol of national heritage.

When critically investigating spaces of conservation in Cape Town a silent violence becomes apparent. Within the city there are thirty-one urban nature reserves, of which only six contain Cape Flats Sand Fynbos. The CFSF, that grows in the vast expanse of land onto which the Apartheid state forcefully displace non-whites from the historic city centre in the 1950s, is the most critically

⁶⁸ Toby Miller, “Michel Foucault, the Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 16, no. 1 (February 2010): 56–57.

⁶⁹ Henrik Ernstson, “Re-Translating Nature in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Material Semiotics of People and Plants at Bottom Road,” ed. Richard Heeks, *Actor-Network Theory for Development: Working Paper Series, Paper 4/2013*. (2013).

⁷⁰ Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁷¹ *Ibid.*



Figure 3.28: Photograph by David Goldblatt of a wild almond hedge at Kirstenbosch that was planted in 1660 to create barriers between the indigenous Khoisan people and the European settlement, 1993



Figure 3.29: A delicate web of string prevents hungry Egyptian geese from feasting at Kirstenbosch, intertwining humans, wild geese, and the cherished seedlings in a complex multispecies interaction, one that fosters the emergence of new botanical narratives.

⁷² Regis Musavengane and Llewellyn Leonard, “When Race and Social Equity Matters in Nature Conservation in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Conservation and Society* 17, no. 2 (2019): 135.

⁷³ Jacob von Heland and Ernstson Henrik, “One Table Two Elephants,” Film, *Telltales Film and the Situated Ecologies Platform in Collaboration with the KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory and the African Centre for Cities*, 2018, <https://vimeo.com/298166514>.

endangered of all fynbos subtypes. With only four sites that are statutorily conserved: Tokai Forest, Rondebosch common, Blaauwberg conservation area and Brackenfell Nature reserve. Each of which have until recently been highly neglected compared to other conservation areas closer to the city bowl and coastal areas. Conservation areas in historical “whites only” areas are bigger, better funded and more preserved. Whereas their counterparts on the Cape Flats, are being conserved due to recent government and community initiatives, the damage done to these spaces in the past has left them severely degraded (see figure 3.30).

Today still, white South Africans are disproportionately represented in conservation circles.⁷¹ When looking at the numbers of domestic visitors to South African National Parks the data shows that between 2012 and 2018, seventy five percent were white South Africans⁷². This is significant when looking at the demographic statistics of South Africa. Between 2012 and 2018 the average percentage of South Africans classified as white was eight percent.

Bridging Dual Agendas: Ecological and Social Development in the Neocolonial City

With a city dealing with the concern of rapid territorial expansion and a vulnerable plant community, a problem that arises is the simultaneous meeting of the double agendas of social development and biodiversity protection, which according to old binary conditions are still dealt with separately. With the increasing urban poverty and segregation of the city on the one edge of the knife, and the pressure to protect the Fynbos that grows within the boundaries of the city on the other. In Cape Town the main approach is one of Cartesian dualism, where space is controlled through expert management and biodiversity mapping techniques that focus on the “value” of areas based on the number of species they contain. Nature reserves within the historic city limits receive the most attention, whilst uncontrolled urban green areas such as vacant plots are categorised as spaces

outside the biodiversity network, with no recognition for the vegetal lives and the multi-species entanglements these spaces hold. This thesis proposes that recognising these sites and letting the plants that reside there, tell their story of the city, could allow for a way to re-think the post-colonial narrative in the city of Cape Town.

Decolonial Ecologies

The documentary film *One Table Two Elephants*⁷³ follows conservationists, a revivalist urban shaman and cape flats break dancers to explore how nature and race are intertwined in post-colonial Cape Town and the Fynbos biome in which the city is situated. The film looks at issues of fynbos conservation by the city of Cape Town's biodiversity network in parallel with the struggle, for the recognition of the Princess vlei Wetland as an important site for the conservation of CFSF and a sacred space for those of Khoisan decent, by a group of bboys and struggle rappers. The film shows the ongoing legacies of Apartheid, poverty, segregation, colonial mindsets and epistemic erasure, but also practices of decolonialisation through creative acts of collective memory. The conservationists still adhere to the Western dualisms where "nature" is separate from culture and history and the role of the human is to protect and return nature to its original form. In the film they work hard to protect the Fynbos from public enemy number one: "alien intruders". On the other hand, the film shows the work of a Khoi educator/historian who is learning the Khoisan language and the breakdancers who fuse hip-hop, indigenous dance styles, and protest art to decolonise their minds and bodies. In the film the language of nature conservation echoes colonial thought.

The conservationists take on the mission of protecting Nature as it was, and how it ought to be, thereby positioning themselves as knowing custodians of Nature. By using modern mapping technologies, the recovery of the alleged original Nature only exists through a highly controlled, rationalized process of spatial design from above. In one of the scenes an uncanny

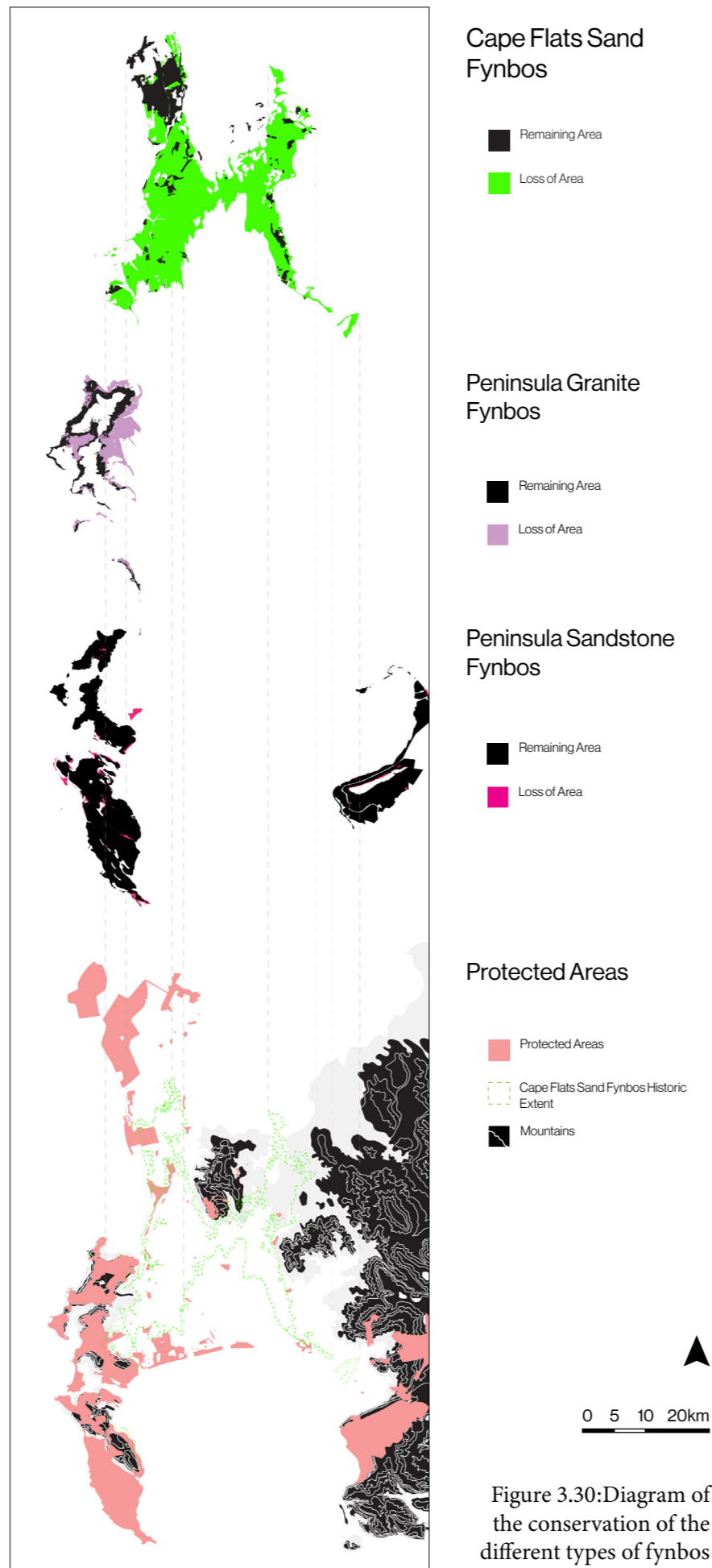


Figure 3.30: Diagram of the conservation of the different types of fynbos

image of hired labourers, all people of colour, weeding under the watchful eye of the white biologist, evokes apartheid legacies of racialised labour division (see figure 3.36). Conservation policies that mandate the removal of alien vegetation often neglect the socio-political contexts of urban poverty and displacement. Programs like Working for Water⁷⁴, which employ labourers to clear invasive species, operate within a framework of biopolitical governance. These initiatives, while framed as ecological restoration, reinforce hierarchies by undervaluing the cultural and economic roles of these plants in marginalized communities. As scholars like Bram Büscher and Robert Fletcher argue, conservation under neoliberalism frequently prioritizes market-based logics, reproducing colonial patterns of exclusion and control.⁷⁵ In another, impoverished locals are framed as a hinderance to conservation and as needing education instead of recognised as being on the wrong side of a violent history. The work of the conservationists seems to be employing the same techniques of Mastery over nature, perpetuating violences of naming, mapping and representing.

As an alternative to the totalising methods of conserving of the conservationists the breakdancers participate in cultivating plural worlds and the promise of different futures through creative memory-work. The dancers and rappers from the community groups: Heal the Hood⁷⁶ and Mixed Mense⁷⁷ aim to decolonize the minds and bodies of the youth through movement. By mixing hip hop with Khoisan traditions, traces of indigenous culture are re-enacted and recreated amidst colonial legacies and erasure and used in the film to protest the destruction of a space that hosts CFSF. Through creative acts of memory, they are partaking in plural worlding to undo colonial logic and move towards a positive future.

Decolonizing Conservation: Entanglements, Epistemic Ruptures, and Multispecies Futures

Decolonial approaches to conservation requires a recognition of the entangled relationships between nature, culture, and politics. This involves acknowledging the historical and ongoing violence embedded in conservation practices while seeking more inclusive and equitable frameworks. Arturo Escobar and Anna Tsing emphasize the need to reimagine conservation as a collaborative, multi-species process that values diverse forms of knowledge.⁷⁸ In the context of Cape Town, this means foregrounding the voices and practices of local communities in shaping conservation strategies. For instance, integrating indigenous and informal ecological knowledge into urban planning can foster a more relational understanding of fynbos as both a cultural and ecological resource. Decolonizing conservation also entails recognizing the agency of plants as active participants in shaping urban spaces and ecologies. Lalu calls for an "epistemic rupture"⁷⁹. This rupture cannot be found in the archives of botany or from within the public sphere that developed alongside botany, biology, ecology and urbanism. Instead, we must turn to decolonial, entangled and speculative practises through which we can write alternative futures for urban nature and cities. This thesis proposes doing this by letting plants speak.

⁷⁴ The Working for Water Programme is an initiative by the department of Forestry, Fishery and the Environment for the clearing of invasive plant species. See: <https://www.dff.gov.za/working-water-wfw-programme>.

⁷⁵ Bram Büscher and Robert Fletcher, *The Conservation Revolution* (Verso Books, 2020).

⁷⁶ Heal the Hood is an NPO that focuses on youth empowerment through arts and community collaboration in the Cape Flats. See: <https://healththehood.org.za/>

⁷⁷ Mixed Mense is a hip hop performance group from Cape Town, South Africa. In the name the Afrikaans word for people: "mense" is used, thus a translation of the full name would be mixed people.

⁷⁸ See: Arturo Escobar, *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds* (Duke Univ Press, 2018); Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015) and Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁷⁹ Premesh Lalu, *The Deaths of Hintsa* (HSRC Publishers, 2009).

Scenes from *One Table Two Elephants*



Figure 3.31: The Khoi revivalist in indigenous attire. Scene overlaid with a GIS Map of the city's Biodiversity Network Plan



Figure 3.33: The breakdance culture in the Cape Flats



Figure 3.35: Scene of one of the Bboys on his bicycle in a street in the Cape Flats



Figure 3.32: Scene of the Cape Flats with Table Mountain in the distance



Figure 3.34: One of the Bboys standing in between Fynbos bushes



Figure 3.36: The conservationist watching over a group of workers clearing alien vegetation

Nature as Alibi: The Politics of Becoming

Rooted in theoretical underpinnings spanning from Marx through Gramsci to Foucault, the concept of using nature as an alibi invokes ecological narratives to render certain people, species, or practices as *other*. This rhetorical strategy reinforces and legitimizes boundaries within a perceived "natural" order, while simultaneously introducing new social and political hierarchies under the guise of environmental authenticity and protection.⁸⁰ This section will investigate how Fynbos, has historically been used to *other*. The political manipulation of Fynbos is intertwined with ongoing struggles for justice and recognition in post-colonial Cape Town.

Of natural heritage

Natural heritage has become a global construct in the identities of nations' dealing with an increasingly globalised world arising from the international market and mass migrations, where the idealisation and protection of "natural" landscapes and their material worth has become a symbol of a nation's unique wealth. A former mayor of the City of Cape Town described Table Mountain as a "national asset" whose value is "measured by every visitor it attracts".⁸¹ The natural heritage of South Africa is embodied above all else in Fynbos, the "fragile, wealth-producing beauties" of the Western Cape.⁸² The Fynbos biome contains around three quarters of the country's endangered plants, and it is the smallest and most biodiverse of the world's six floral regions.⁸³ It covers only four percent of Southern Africa, but forty four percent of the region's plants are found here. In 2004 it was classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site, and it is listed by Conservation International as one of the world's "biodiversity hotspots"⁸⁴ According to Kate Black, Table Mountain alone contains more plant species than is found on the entirety of the British Isles.⁸⁵

Fynbos has come to stand for a traditional heritage of national natural rootedness.⁸⁶ In the not-so-distant past, Fynbos was seen along the same lines that alien plants are seen today. Fynbos was seen by settler farmers as poor grazing material growing in barren soil. A landscape of grassland or trees, that bind the soil and provide fuel was much preferred to a fynbos landscape that was deemed "useless". The values that inform our perception of Fynbos has altered much since then. Now it is widely considered a "climax community" or evolutionary end-point to be achieved and conserved.⁸⁷

Commodify to conserve

Being described by researchers as under serious threat, Fynbos has increasingly become the object of government protection. The main threat to Fynbos is allocated to invasive plant species, who in South African environmental discourse has overtaken even human beings. Since the 1960s the export of fynbos flowers has boomed into a huge industry, with market demand leading to increased "passion" around these plants.⁸⁸ Within the context of South Africa as a post-colony, where conservation is entangled in colonial and apartheid legacies, and where the inherited social inequality begs that human livelihoods are prioritised over the non-human in political discourse and policy, the environmental logic that is the most digestible is that nature needs to be commodified in order to conserve it. With fynbos this means the promotion of sustainable wildflower harvesting and the promotion of ecotourism.⁸⁹

Protea – the creation of a national symbol

Flowers have for long acted as symbols for countries. The King Protea, the quintessential fynbos plant, has been the national emblem of South Africa for almost fifty years, appearing on the state emblem and as the symbol worn by representatives of the country internationally (see figures). Fynbos, is according to Cheryl McEwan regarded as the "rich cloak" and distinctive identity of the Western Cape Province of South Africa, with the protea flower symbolising Cape Town's emergence as a global city.⁹⁰

80 Paul Robbins, *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

81 See "Ukuvuka the Biggest Ever," editorial, *Cape Times*, 7 February 2000, p.10.

82 John L. Comaroff, "Nations With/ out Borders. Neoliberalism and the Problem of Belonging in Africa, and Beyond," ed. Randeria Shalini, *Border Crossings - Grenzver-Schiebungen Und Grenzüberschreitungen in Einer Globalisierten Welt*, n.d.

83 Ashwell et al, *Fynbos Fynmense: People Making Biodiversity Work* (SANBI, 2006).

84 With biodiversity hotspots explained as the most abundant and threatened reservoirs of plant and animal life on earth.

85 Kate Black, "New Challenge: Get to Know Your Fynbos," *The Table Mountain Fund*, 2017, <https://www.thetablemountainfund.org.za/new-challenge-get-to-know-your-fynbos/>.

86 Cheryl McEwan, "Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023): 1114–1137.

87 *Ibid.*

88 *Ibid.*

89 *Ibid.*

90 *Ibid.*, 1115.

90

Ibid. 114–37.

91

Proteus, a Greek sea god, is known for his ability to change shape at will and for his knowledge of all things past, present, and future. Often associated with the mutable nature of the sea, he symbolizes adaptability and the elusiveness of truth, as he could only be compelled to reveal his knowledge by those who managed to capture him.

92

Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge England; New York, Ny: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

93

Cheryl McEwan, "Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023): 1115.

94

See: Tony Rebelo, *Sasol Proteas* (Fernwood Press, 1995). And AG Rebelo, "Protea Atlas Project," www.proteaatlas.org.za, 2004, <https://www.proteaatlas.org.za/>.

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Cheryl McEwan, "Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023): 1118.

Proteas are conservation species because they are endemic and symbolic of regional and national allegiance, vulnerable to extinction, a keystone species in the Fynbos biome and aesthetically distinctive and charismatic. The name Protea comes from the Greek god Proteus⁹¹, by the Dutch botanist Linnaeus, after acquiring samples through the Dutch imperial botanical network in 1735.⁹² He chose the name because it described the protea species' versatility, adaptability and many forms. It also encapsulates the difficulty fynbos plants presented to be placed in rigid taxonomies, thriving in extreme conditions, with irregular lifecycles.⁹³ They appear enigmatic to botanist because of their confusing diversity, with some species being rhizomatic and other seed-dispersers, whilst appearing to be the same. Because of this complexity, it took years to classify proteas, when Linnaeus published *Species Plantarum* in 1753 only six species had been identified, today taxonomies are still being updated regularly.⁹⁴



Figure 3.37: A photograph of the Pin cushion Protea

Proteas attract more political attention than any other plant in South Africa. McEwan writes that:

"They (proteas) inhabit political spaces of biopolitics, evoking memories of various pasts, becoming contested symbols of regional and national identity and, at historical junctures, transferring from the botanical to the socio-political in (de)politicizing colonial dispossession, racism, and nationalism."⁹⁵

From the late nineteenth century, informal traders from marginalized communities in Cape Town began harvesting wildflowers to sell in the city's centre.⁹⁶ Concurrently, colonial urban elites appropriated indigenous flora as symbols of identity, promoting their scientific and aesthetic appreciation as part of imperial patriotism, local nationalism, and a marker of "civilization".⁹⁷ This alignment with indigenous flora served dual purposes: ideologically, it fostered a sense of regional identity within a fragmented settler state, and practically, it protected elite land use by marginalizing the subsistence practices of impoverished communities.⁹⁸ The protea, increasingly endangered by over-harvesting, became a tool to depoliticize land dispossession and forced removals of people of colour under the guise of conservation efforts.

Floral Nativism and the Politics of Proteas

The establishment of Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden in Cape Town in 1913, the same year as the implementation of the Native Land Act, which confined Africans to just seven percent of South Africa's land, marked a pivotal moment for "floral nativism".⁹⁹ Advocacy by white residents, amateur botanists, and wildflower enthusiasts resulted in legislation such as the 1905 Flower Protection Bill and the 1937 Wildflower Protection Ordinance.¹⁰⁰ While these measures commodified indigenous flowers that had once been dismissed as weeds, they disproportionately disadvantaged Black flower-pickers, exacerbating inequalities in access to land and resources.¹⁰¹ Political leaders began explicitly framing proteas as

a valuable natural asset. During apartheid, proteas were utilized as symbolic "diplomats" in international events to project favourable images of the apartheid regime abroad.¹⁰² Simultaneously, botanists emphasized their status as endangered species within a "unique biome," elevating them to the role of a "passionately protected icon of national, natural rootedness".¹⁰³ In 1976, the King Protea was declared South Africa's national flower, inspiring poet and anti-apartheid activist Don Mattera to respond critically with his poem titled "Protea":

Protea ...

The Protea is not a flower

It is a dome of fluttering flags tombs of Afrikaner relics
and monuments of ox-wagon dipped in blood

It is the flight of the Blackman's spear flung in hostile
fear

of lost possession

Conquered manhood and broken pride

It is the tears of my bonded people

falling on Pretoria's marble steps the victims of
subjugation

The Protea can never be a flower

Not while the soul

of South Africa struggles to be set free ...¹⁰⁴

In her article "Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies" McEwan writes that proteas are the perfect species with which to tell stories. Through their multispecies interactions and rich haptic, olfactory, and gustatory meanings, they have emerged as powerful symbols in narratives of colonialism, conservation, floral nativism, post-apartheid nation-building, and contested ecologies. These plants also bring into focus the agency of Black communities, who first recognized, utilized,

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See: Boehl Melanie, "Flowers Are South Africa's Silent Ambassadors: Flower Shows and Botanical Diplomacy in South Africa," in *The Politics of Nature and Science in Southern Africa*, ed. Maano Ramutsindela and Giorgio Miescher (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2016), 149–76. And L. Rabe, "Living History: The Story of Adderley Street's Flower Sellers," *South African Journal for Cultural History* 24, no. 1 (2010): 83–104.

97

Donal P. McCracken and Eileen M. McCracken, *The Way to Kirstenbosch* (London: Routledge, 1988).

98

Lance Van Sittert, "Making the Cape Floral Kingdom: The Discovery and Defence of Indigenous Flora at the Cape Ca. 1890-1939," *Landscape Research* 28, no. 1 (January 2003): 113–29.

99

Floral nativism refers to the ideological promotion of indigenous plant species as symbols of national identity, heritage, and belonging, often used to assert cultural and political authenticity. This concept is closely tied to conservation efforts that prioritize native flora while marginalizing or demonizing non-native species, reflecting broader discourses of territorial ownership and autochthony in postcolonial contexts. See: Boehl Melanie, "Flowers Are South Africa's Silent Ambassadors: Flower Shows and Botanical Diplomacy in South Africa," in *The Politics of Nature and Science in Southern Africa*, ed. Maano Ramutsindela and Giorgio Miescher (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2016), 149–76.

100

GW Davis, "Commercial Wildflower Production in the Fynbos Biome and Its Role in the Management of Land-Use," (Doctoral Dissertation, 1990)

101

J.P.H. Acocks, *Veld Types of South Africa* (South African Department of Agriculture, 1951).

102

Boehl Melanie, "Flowers Are South Africa's Silent Ambassadors: Flower Shows and Botanical Diplomacy in South Africa," in *The Politics of Nature and Science in Southern Africa*, ed. Maano Ramutsindela and Giorgio Miescher (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2016), 149–76.

103

Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South* (Routledge, 2015), pg. 99.

104

Find the poem in: Don Mattera, *Azanian Love Song* (African Perspectives Publishing, 2007).

105

Cheryl McEwan, "Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023), 1129.

and commodified wildflowers, as well as their critical botanical expertise in elevating proteas to broader prominence. Proteas highlight the ecological damage caused by the limitations of colonial scientific practices, serving as storytellers that facilitate understanding of biodiversity loss and the effects of anthropogenic climate change. Crucially, they do so while acknowledging historical and ongoing injustices, offering pathways toward a decolonized environmental politics.¹⁰⁵

The War on Aliens

Jean and John L. Comaroff writes that in South Africa there are two sides to "naturalisation". The first relates to the assimilation of alien beings and practices into the accepted order of things, and the second and relevant to this thesis is the deployment of "nature as alibi or fertile allegory for making people and objects strange...to forge critical new social and political distinctions."¹⁰⁶ In this section, how fynbos has been used as an alibi to demonise alien vegetation, speaks of a broader cultural moment in the country.



Figure 3.38: The King Protea, South Africa's national plant

The Alien Invasion

In the year 2000, two years after South Africa became a democracy, Cape Town was devastated by one of the most destructive fires the city had ever see. In total, around 9000 hectares of land burned. This fire brought about a natural/political movement which is still being fought in South Africa today, and as Comaroff and Comaroff put it: "it cast a penetrating light on conditions-of-being in the psotcolony."¹⁰⁷ The fire brought forth the implicit landscape of affect and anxiety, inclusion and exclusion and prosperity and loss of the newly founded democratic nation. Fire is endemic to the Fynbos biome and is a necessary part of the ecology of the region. However, the blame for a blaze such as has never been seen before was given to alien vegetation that burn more readily and more furiously than the Fynbos.¹⁰⁸ In a humorous reference to the sudden alarm towards alien vegetation the Cape Argus published a cartoon of a UFO hovering over Cape Town as it sank into the globally warmed sea, with Table Mountain covered in foreign flora, with the caption: "They seem to have a problem with Aliens" (figure).¹⁰⁹ The cartoon, wittingly or not gestured toward a subconscious landscape of civic terror and moral alarm.¹¹⁰

The debate over alien plant species invading the Fynbos biome reflects broader political and cultural tensions within South Africa, underscoring anxieties about national identity, sovereignty, and belonging. This preoccupation with "aliens" extends beyond botany and environmental science, resonating with questions of citizenship and nationhood in postcolonial contexts. The presence of invasive species has become a metaphor for deeper concerns about boundaries and their transgression, raising critical questions about the integrity of nation-states, particularly in an erawhere global capitalism disrupts traditional notions of sovereignty and belonging. In South Africa and other postcolonial states, this obsession with policing borders, be they ecological, cultural, or political, reveals an existential struggle over the meaning of national identity. Historically defined by fluid human, animal, and plant migrations, these

states now confront intensified anxieties about foreignness and invasion.¹¹¹ Advances in technology and globalization have accelerated the movement of people, goods, and information, challenging governments' ability to regulate these flows and leading to a sense of being under constant threat from external forces while grappling with internal disintegration. This fear is evident in South Africa's lament over the emigration of skilled professionals and athletes¹¹², juxtaposed with xenophobic responses to the influx of immigrants, who are often subject to severe social violence.¹¹³ The "alien" debate, thus, encapsulates broader issues of identity, sovereignty, and the fragility of nation-building in the context of global interconnectivity and historical legacies of colonialism.

The Politics of Alien Vegetation

The introduction of Australian wattles and myrtle to the Cape Flats, was introduced by the colonial secretary in the early years of colonisation as a means to bind the windswept sands of the area and to provide screens for the city, from the dust blown off the sand dunes. By the late seventeenth century, the government was encouraging large plantations of cluster pines and other imported plants such as hakea and Port Jackson wattles. The necessity of these plants to take root was deemed great enough to warrant prizes awarded to those with the most land planted. Where today, there is a tax on foreign seed and landowners are forced to clear their properties of these "invaders".¹¹⁴ Cape Town has recently experienced massive droughts, with the dreaded "day zero"¹¹⁵ still looming large in the minds of residents. To exacerbate the demonisation of foreign plant species, it is widely acknowledged that they are more water thirsty than the hardy fynbos plants, and because of this they became both the subject of ecological emergency and national renewal,¹¹⁶ sparking government funded projects such as the Working for Water Programme.¹¹⁷ The project was started in 1995 as a flagship project in the new government's Reconstruction and Development initiative. The sole focus of the project was to eradicate alien vegetation and

in so doing, create jobs and combat poverty. The tone of the program is one of urgency, with: "[Alien plants] are similar to a health epidemic, spreading widely out of control" written on their website's homepage. The targeted intervention in managing invasive species in South Africa aimed to achieve more than ecological restoration. These efforts were positioned as tools to revitalize marginalized communities and promote social equity. Initiatives focused on providing employment and rehabilitation opportunities for unemployed women, youth, ex-offenders, and the homeless through participation in alien species eradication programs and industries that repurposed invasive plants into marketable goods. Concurrently, the public was encouraged to avoid buying or selling alien plants and to report individuals who facilitated their proliferation. In this way, invasive nature was framed as both a threat and a resource, serving as the foundation for a vision of communal renewal and transformation.

The Politics of Belonging

In the years following the democratisation of South Africa, connections between the war against aliens and the collective prosperity of the nation was made more and more commonly, with even former president Thabo Mbeki being quoted that alien plants: "stand in the way of the African renaissance."¹¹⁸ However it was in a letter to the Mail & Guardian that laid bare the political subtext of this "war on aliens". The author wrote: "It is alien-bashing time again. As an alien ... I am particularly prickly about criticisms of aliens even if they are plants ... Alien plants cannot of course respond to these accusations. But before the Department of Home Affairs is dragooned into investigating the residence permits of these plants I, as a concerned fellow alien, wish to remind one and all that plants such as maize ... soybean, sunflower ... originated outside of the continent of Africa. In any case, did the fire-and-flood-causing alien plants cross the borders and establish plantations ... by themselves?" To this foreigner, it was evident that the crusade continued same lines of thought that drive the

106
Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2001): 627-51.
107
Ibid.
108
Guy Preston, special advisor to Ronnie Kasrils, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, quoted in J. Yeld, 'Force Landowners to Clear Invading Alien Plants', *Sunday Argus*, 22-23 January 2000.

109
Chip, 'They Seem to have a Problem with Aliens', *Cape Argus*, January 27, 2000

110
Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2001): 627-51.

111
J. Crush, A. Jeeves, and D. Yudelman, *South Africa's Labour Empire: A History of Migrancy to the Gold Mines* (Cape Town, 1991).

112
See for example, 'Official Figures for Brain Drain Released', *The Star*, 14 March 2000

113
R. Kadali, 'Defy Barney's Thought Police', *Mail & Guardian*, 18-24 February 2000.

114
Hall, 'Invasive Weeds', in Fynbos Ecology, p. 135; I. Macdonald, M. Jarman, and P. Beeston (eds), *Management of Invasive Alien Plants in the Fynbos Biome*. South African National Scientific Programmes, Report No. 111 (Pretoria, Foundation for Research Development, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research 115

"Day Zero" refers to the moment when Cape Town was projected to run out of municipal water supply due to an extreme drought between 2015 and 2018. This term gained international attention as Cape Town approached becoming the first major city in the modern era to face the prospect of shutting off taps to conserve water for essential use. The city never reached this point.

116
Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2001): 627-51.

117
See: The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment of the Republic of South Africa, "Working for Water (WfW) Programme | Department of Environmental Affairs," <https://www.dffeg.gov.za/working-water-wfw-programme>.

118
Message from President Thabo Mbeki, read by Valli Moosa, Minister for Environmental Affairs and Tourism, at the International Symposium on Best Management Practices for Preventing and Controlling Invasive Alien Species, Kirstenbosch, 22-24 February 2000; see also K. Bliksem, 'Only the Truly Patriotic can be Trusted to Smell the Roses, and Weed Them Out', *Sunday Independent*, 22 February 2000.

119
Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2001): 645.

120
See: Radebe, 'Time We Became a Bit More Neighbourly'; and M. Sinclair, 'Unwilling Aliens: Forced Migrants in the New South Africa', *Indicator*, 13, 3 (1996), 14-18; Reitzes, 'Alien Issues'.

121
Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2001): 649.

122
Ibid. 650.
123
Ibid. 650-651.

naturalisation of xenophobia, that Comaroff and Comaroff describe as the demonisation of migrants and refugees by the state and its citizenry alike.¹¹⁹

The Irony of Xenophobia in South Africa

The irony of rising xenophobia in South Africa is heightened by the fact that it unfolds among a population historically familiar with displacement and exile, who once coexisted relatively peacefully with in-migrating labour. This growing hostility has evolved from a vague sense of unease into overt antipathy toward what is now perceived as a shadowy "alien-nation" of so-called illegal immigrants. These individuals, labelled as "economic vultures," are accused of taking jobs and resources, fostering crime, and contributing to societal decline, uncannily paralleling the characterization of invasive alien plants as uncontrollable threats draining the nation's wealth.¹²⁰ This shift reflects a transformation in the conception of citizenship. Modernist ideals of a unified community of equal, rights-bearing individuals have given way to a fragmented polity where difference is seen as intrinsic and unresolvable. Citizenship, once rooted in shared fraternity, has shifted toward a model prioritizing autochthony, an attachment to the land viewed as the most authentic form of belonging.¹²¹ In this context, identity becomes vertically grounded, like the traditional conception of native plants, and all other forms of connection, such as immigration or naturalization, are deemed secondary.

Alien Ecologies: Vegetation and Identity

A similar dynamic applies to alien vegetation, which may serve as a livelihood for some while symbolizing ecological disaster for others. The movement of plants and people across borders exposes the tensions between openness and closure, regulation and deregulation, and otherness and indigenization. For instance, the jacaranda, often considered "almost the national tree," has sparked debates about whether it is a naturalized part of South Africa's identity or an unwelcome intruder. The fact that such discussions now verge on issues of subliminal

racism and ethnic cleansing reveals how deeply concerns about borders, belonging, and alienation have intensified in recent times.¹²² This dynamic has unwittingly endorsed a new form of post-racist racism, one that cloaks itself in the rhetoric of autochthony and alien-nature while seamlessly coexisting with the transnational discourse of universal rights. Discourses of nature, in this context, shed crucial light on the everyday practices and events through which belonging and citizenship in the city are redefined, exposing their darker counterpart: the politics of exclusion. Specifically, they reveal why autochthony, a mode of attachment that binds people to place, naturalizes the nation, and legitimizes claims of entitlement, has become so prominent in a time when the concept of nationhood is both essential and fragile. This paradox emerges against a backdrop of porous and contested borders, where a strained political imagination struggles to interpret social identity amidst the forces of global laissez-faire capitalism.¹²³

Becoming with fynbos

While the alienation of the Cape Flats remains woven into Cape Town's urban fabric, this alienation also offers fertile ground for transformation. Spaces such as the Bottom Road Sanctuary and Princess Vlei demonstrate how alienation can be reimagined as a generative force, fostering hybrid ecologies and new social solidarities. In these projects, marginalized communities and Fynbos plants co-produce spaces of care and resistance, challenging the lingering legacies of colonial exclusion. By embracing the contested nature of these sites and recognizing the agency of plants, these initiatives reclaim forgotten or neglected landscapes and weave them back into the city's socio-ecological networks. Here, alienation becomes a productive friction, catalysing alternative imaginaries of coexistence and belonging that reject apartheid's spatial logics. These examples show that the Cape Flats is not only a site of historical violence but also a space of possibility where new relationships between human and more-than-human life take root.

The Bottom Road Sanctuary: Cultivating Coexistence

Grassroots ecological rehabilitation projects are increasingly challenging the boundaries between nature and culture, particularly in urban contexts where histories of marginalization are deeply embedded in the landscape. Bottom Road, located in Grassy Park, Cape Town, is one such initiative. This section traces the transformation of Bottom Road from an ecologically degraded and socially neglected site into a vibrant Cape Flats Sand fynbos sanctuary, shaped by the collaborative agency of human and non-human actors. Through this lens, the initiative reveals the deeply political nature of urban ecologies and their capacity to reconfigure relationships within more-than-human assemblages

Grassy Park, where Bottom Road is situated, lies along the northern shore of Zeekoevlei, a seasonal wetland within Cape Town's Cape Flats. During apartheid, Grassy Park was designated a "coloured" area under the Group Areas Act.¹²⁴ Despite its wetlands, the apartheid government treated much of the region as expendable, leading to environmental degradation and socio-spatial neglect. In 2005, the City of Cape Town rezoned the northern shore of Zeekoevlei from public open space to residential land. Small plots were sold to residents, many of whom had lived in Grassy Park or nearby neighbourhoods. These plots, described by locals as "rubbish dumps", became the foundation for an unexpected ecological and social transformation.¹²⁵

From Fences to Gardens

The rehabilitation of Bottom Road began serendipitously, through an encounter between Kelvin Cochrane, a local baker and resident, and Derrick, a conservation manager from Rondevlei Nature Reserve. Although their initial motivations for engaging in the project were different, Kelvin drawn by a desire to uplift his community and Derrick by the conservation ideals of clearing non-indigenous vegetation, it was their shared concern for the cape flats sand fynbos plant community that wove their ideals together and initiative a project that transcended community empowerment and conservation, reimagining Bottom Road as a post-natural space of entangled human and more-than-human agency. Cochrane, struck by the stark contrast between the high security walls on the "White" side of Zeekoevlei and the neglected conditions of his own community, envisioned an alternative relationship with the vlei. Instead of walled-off plots, he proposed a collective landscape, a "plant sanctuary", that would reimagine property boundaries as shared ecological and social spaces.¹²⁶

Without formal training in conservation or planting, Cochrane pitched his idea to his neighbours, encountering resistance rooted in socio-political anxieties, including fears of gang violence and the vulnerability of

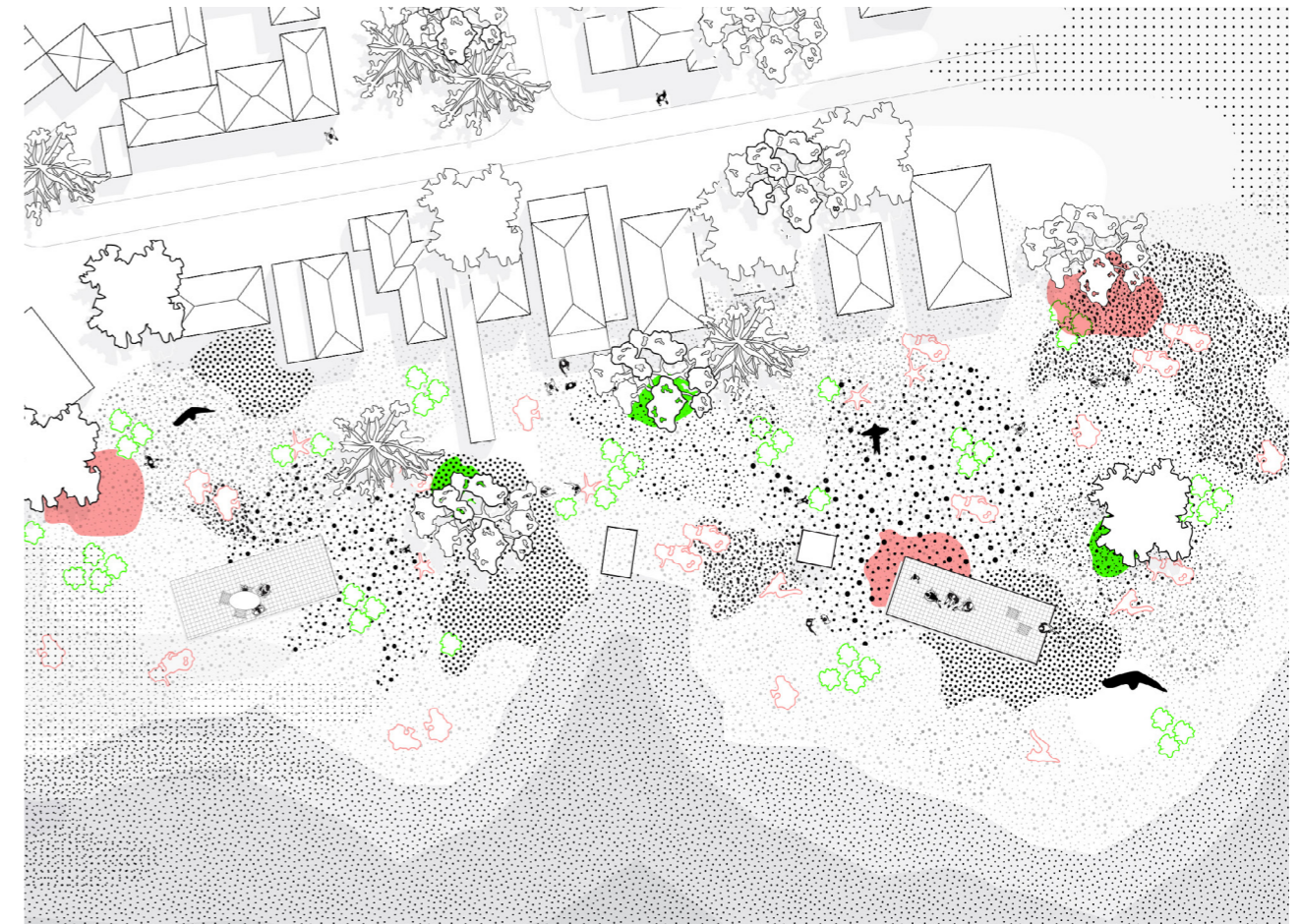


Figure 3.38: Drawing of Bottom Road Fynbos sanctuary in Grassy Park in the Cape Flats

unfenced homes. After extensive dialogue among ten households, the project moved forward, connecting properties to foster communal stewardship. Over four years, with the support of conservation managers, the residents planted approximately 50,000 fynbos plants, transforming the site into a dynamic space of human and ecological collaboration. This transformation was not merely ecological; it redefined the cultural and social fabric of the neighbourhood. Walkways, benches, braai (barbeque) areas, and wooden roof structures known as bomas¹²⁷ created shared spaces for gathering, while the flourishing fynbos attracted pollinators, birds, and amphibians, further entangling human and non-human lives within a vibrant network of co-existence.¹²⁸

Plants as agents of transformation

The Bottom Road initiative offers a critical counter-narrative to techno-managerial approaches to conservation, such as Cape Town's Biodiversity Network, which relies on data-driven prioritization and had excluded this site from its conservation framework. In contrast, Bottom Road demonstrates the transformative potential of embodied, grassroots engagement with land. Through practices of "learning-by-doing," residents and plants co-created an emergent ecology, challenging Cartesian separations of nature and culture. Here, conservation was not an imposed framework but a hybrid practice of *becoming-with* plants, emphasizing relational care and iterative adaptation over rigid planning. Fynbos, in this context, played a vital role as a more-than-human agent of ecological and cultural reconnection.

124
Henrik Ernstson, "The Political Nature of Urban Wetlands: Speaking from Princess Vlei Wetland, Cape Town," *Urban Wetlands: South Asia*, no. 2 (2014).

125
Henrik Ernstson, "Re-Translating Nature in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Material Semiotics of People and Plants at Bottom Road," ed. Richard Heeks, *Actor-Network Theory for Development: Working Paper Series*, Paper 4/2013. (2013).

127
A Boma is a common South African roofed structures used as a communal space for social interaction, cultural expression, and decision making.

128
Henrik Ernstson, "Re-Translating Nature in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Material Semiotics of People and Plants at Bottom Road," ed. Richard Heeks, *Actor-Network Theory for Development: Working Paper Series*, Paper 4/2013. (2013).

By reclaiming spaces degraded through apartheid's socio-ecological violence, the fynbos re-inscribed these areas with new meanings and possibilities.

“You see, when you say fynbos to people, let’s take the coloured people. Say fynbos to them, and they tell you, ‘what is that’. ‘No, that must only grow in the mountain, or it only grows in Kirstenbosch [Botanical Garden].’ That’s the belief system. Now, one must understand this, that [the reason] they believe that, [is] because that is what is projected. [...] They don’t realize that there is eight thousand fynbos, or eight and half thousand species; there is mountainous species, and the plain sand fynbos, they don’t understand that. So they only believe it’s from the mountain, or it’s in Kirstenbosch: ‘That’s where it’s gotta be. If you want to see fynbos you go there.’ They don’t realize that fynbos can be put into their backyard”¹²⁹

Cochrane's reflections, quoted by Ernstson, articulate the cultural estrangement many residents felt from fynbos, often perceived as distant and belonging exclusively to spaces like Kirstenbosch Botanical Gardens. Through the Bottom Road project, fynbos moved into backyards, disrupting exclusionary geographies and redefining it as an everyday presence in marginalized communities.

Post-Natural Futures

The transformation of Bottom Road offers valuable lessons for reimagining urban ecologies in post-colonial cities. By rejecting the binary between nature and culture, this grassroots initiative demonstrates the potential for marginalized communities to reclaim ecological agency and reshape urban spaces through collaborative efforts. The rehabilitation of Bottom Road mediated not only human relationships but also entanglements between people, plants, and state conservation resources, embedding ecological restoration within a framework of social and spatial justice. The stories of Bottom Road residents, of exclusion from the vleis during apartheid and of reclaiming this space through collective action, illustrate how ecological rehabilitation can serve as a form of social and spatial justice. This grassroots project demonstrates how ecological rehabilitation can serve as a counterpoint to traditional conservation paradigms, fostering inclusive, hybrid ecologies that align biodiversity protection with the lived realities of historically marginalized populations. As Cape Town and other cities contend with the overlapping legacies of colonialism, apartheid, and urbanization, the Bottom Road sanctuary offers a compelling blueprint for socially inclusive, ecologically restorative urban futures. It illustrates that the political ecology of cities is inherently post-natural, a dynamic interplay of human and more-than-human forces that can reimagine the boundaries of the urban in profoundly transformative ways.

¹²⁹ Taken from a conversation between Henrik Ernstson and Mikey, a baker from grassy park found in: Henrik Ernstson, "Re-Translating Nature in Post-Apartheid Cape Town: The Material Semiotics of People and Plants at Bottom Road," ed. Richard Heeks, *Actor-Network Theory for Development. Working Paper Series, Paper 4/2013*. (2013).

¹³⁰ Vlei is the Afrikaans word for wetland.
¹³¹ From a conversation between Kevin Cochrane and Henrik Ernstson found in: Henrik Ernstson, "The 'Genius of the Pagan': Southern Urbanism, Ontological Politics and Decolonization," in *Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School* (Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School, Universität Trier, 2017), 6–9 June 2017.

¹³² Ernstson Henrik, "The 'Genius of the Pagan': Southern Urbanism, Ontological Politics and Decolonization," (Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School, Universität Trier, 6–9 June 2017), 2017.

¹³³ *Ibid.*
¹³⁴ Lance Van Sittert, "Making the Cape Floral Kingdom: The Discovery and Defence of Indigenous Flora at the Cape Ca. 1890-1939," *Landscape Research* 28, no. 1 (January 2003): 113–29.

¹³⁵ Ernstson Henrik, "The 'Genius of the Pagan': Southern Urbanism, Ontological Politics and Decolonization," (Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School, Universität Trier, 6–9 June 2017), 2017.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*
¹³⁷ Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough* (Ohio University Press, 2005).

Princess Vlei: Restoring an Entangled Commons

Princess Vlei¹³⁰, a wetland in the Cape Flats of Cape Town, stands as a powerful testament to the intricate entanglements of ecological preservation, cultural memory, and social justice. It is one of the few remaining pockets of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos. However, it holds not only ecological- but also cultural significance. Wetlands like Princess Vlei play a vital ecological role, creating unique border zones between land and water that support high levels of biodiversity. They act as natural sponges, mitigating flooding, a critical function in the Cape Flats, where seasonal floods impact vulnerable communities seasonally. This wetland came under threat when plans for a shopping mall on the vlei's banks were proposed in the early 2000s, with plans gaining momentum around 2008. Such development would disrupt the natural interplay between the wetland, its streams, and rainfall, potentially increasing flood risks for those living in the surrounding areas. The controversy surrounding the project escalated over the following years, leading to widespread community resistance. The Save Princess Vlei campaign, which began in response to these plans, ultimately succeeded in halting the mall development in 2019, after a five-year campaign. Even though the protection of the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos was a huge driver in this effort, the resistance to the mall's construction was not purely ecological, it was deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and social narratives.

The Legend of Princess Vlei

A rich oral history, passed down through generations, ties Princess Vlei to the indigenous people of the Cape. According to legend, the vlei was named after a Khoi princess who was raped and killed by settlers in the sixteenth century. Her tears, it is said, flowed down from Elephant's Eye Cave on Table Mountain, filling the wetland, where she was murdered. ¹³¹ This legend imbues the vlei with spatial and symbolic significance, connecting the mountain and the vlei through a narrative of violence, grief, and resilience. The

tears of the princess symbolically crossed apartheid-era barriers, including the railway line often referred to as Cape Town's "Berlin Wall," ¹³² which separated white and coloured neighbourhoods. The story challenges colonial and apartheid spatial hierarchies, asserting that coloured people, creole descendants of the Khoi, San, Europeans, and enslaved peoples, have a historical and emotional claim to green spaces like the mountain, which were long monopolized by white elites. ¹³³

Resistance and Memory

The movement to protect Princess Vlei was led by residents of the nearby working-class neighbourhoods of Grassy Park, Lavender Hill, and Steenberg. These areas were shaped by apartheid-era forced removals, where families classified as coloured were displaced from their homes and relocated to the Cape Flats. ¹³⁴ Many of the protestors carried personal and collective memories of this displacement. ¹³⁵ For these communities, Princess Vlei became more than a site of urban nature, it was a space imbued with layers of memory and meaning. The struggle against the mall united environmental concerns with demands for social justice, transforming the vlei into a symbol of resistance against historical and ongoing oppression. The wetland, in Ernstson's words, "vibrates with layered meaning," ¹³⁶ bridging postcolonial urban studies and environmental politics.

Princess Vlei serves as a compelling example of how environmental struggles can intersect with broader socio-political narratives. As a site of memory and activism, it offers an alternative history rooted in social and generational relations rather than written records. Mohamed Adhikari's observation that communities often self-censor their histories underscores the significance of this resistance. ¹³⁷ The campaign to protect Princess Vlei challenged this tendency, asserting the historical and cultural agency of a marginalized community. Ernstson asks whether the Princess Vlei could also become a site for broader critiques of Cape Town's urban inequalities. Could this "environmental

struggle" be reframed as a discursive tool or register to critique the city more broadly? Might it contribute to constructing an alternative history of the vlei, one rooted in social and generational relations rather than written records, highlighting the experiences of a community often denied a history by others?¹³⁸ By resisting the mall, the vlei became a unifying space for historically marginalised communities and a vulnerable plant community, fostering solidarity across cultural and natural divides.

Protesting with Plants

The campaign to save Princess Vlei illustrates how plant and human politics can intertwine. The wetland, with its endangered Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, became both a symbol and an ally in the struggle. By framing the wetland as a site of ecological and cultural significance, the movement emphasized the interconnectedness of urban nature and human lives. Princess Vlei exemplifies "protesting with plants," where the defence of an ecosystem becomes a broader assertion of identity, history, and justice. This case study demonstrates how natural landscapes, such as wetlands, can transcend their technical definitions to become emotional and historical terrains of struggle and hope. As a site where ecological preservation meets social resistance, Princess Vlei can inspire new ways of thinking about the politics of urban nature and the agency of plants.

The politics of plants in Cape Town reveal the deep entanglement between ecological processes and historical power dynamics. Through the lens of fynbos and its relationship with colonial and post-colonial discourses, it becomes clear that urban nature cannot be understood as neutral or passive. Rather, plants are active participants in the social, cultural, and political realms, contributing to the formation of landscapes that are both contested and transformative. Efforts to decolonise urban nature must go beyond surface-level recognition of indigenous knowledge and practices; they must address the historical violences and exclusions embedded in current environmental and

urban frameworks. By reclaiming and reimagining the political potential of plants there is an opportunity to dismantle colonial legacies and foster more just, equitable, and sustainable urban futures.

Alienation as Possibility: Reframing Exclusion in the Post-Natural City

In this chapter the infrastructures of alienation in Cape Town emerge clearly through a combination of spatial, ecological, and political mechanisms that have perpetuated exclusion and marginalization. These infrastructures aren't just physical; they operate through policies, ideologies, and cultural practices that continue to shape the socio-ecological fabric of the city today. In the neo-colonial territory, alienation operates as both a scar and a possibility. The spatial and ecological remains of apartheid planning continue to divide communities and marginalize the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos biome. However, by reframing alienation through the lenses of post-natural theory and xenofeminism, this chapter has demonstrated its potential as a frictional force for transformation. Rather than viewing alienation solely as a mechanism of exclusion, we can embrace it as a generative force that sparks new urban imaginaries and hybrid ecologies. The analysis of plant politics and colonial durabilities in Cape Town underscores the enduring power of landscapes to shape socio-political relations. Nature, far from being a passive backdrop, has been actively instrumentalised in projects of segregation and control. Yet, the Fynbos of the Cape Flats, hold the potential to disrupt these narratives. By recognizing the agency of more-than-human actors in shaping urban spaces, we challenge the boundaries imposed by colonial and apartheid structures.

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Ernstson Henrik, "The 'Genius of the Pagan': Southern Urbanism, Ontological Politics and Decolonization," (Decolonizing Urbanism Summer School, Universität Trier, 6–9 June 2017), 2017.

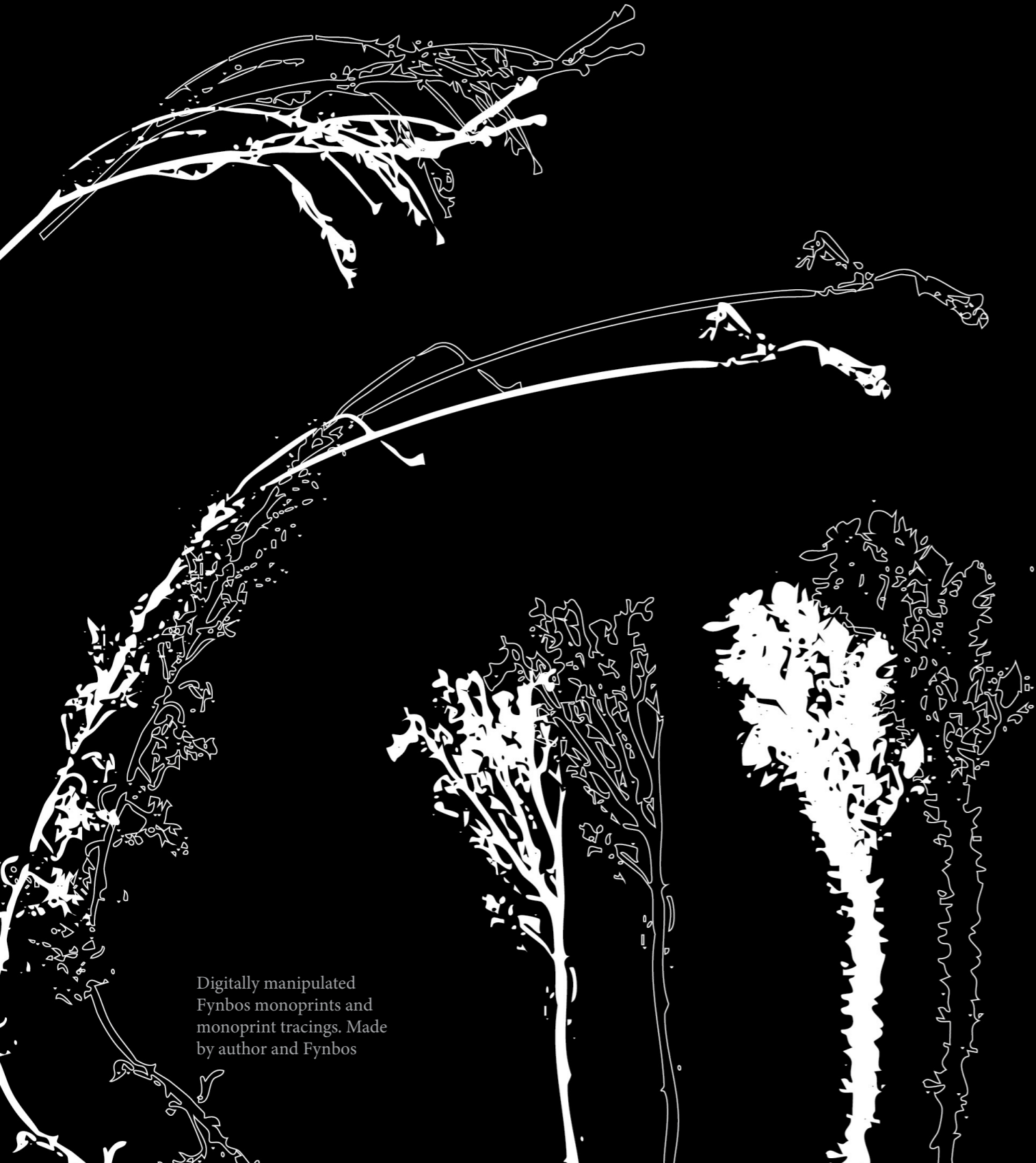
* See: Price Ayesha, *Save the Princess*, 2013. Available to view at: <https://wammuseum.org/artwork/save-the-princess/>



Figure 3.38: "Save the Princess", mixed media protest art installation by Ayesha Price, 2013. The artist statement: "Princess Vlei is a wetland in an urban area of Cape Town and a site of trauma: haunted by myths, riled with urban legends, Princess Vlei is inextricably linked to the displacement of people and is currently under real threat of destruction by commercial development."

As the thesis transitions toward speculative storytelling and fictional futures, the concept of alienation becomes a vital tool for imagining alternative urban realities. In embracing alienation as a site of *fiction-friction*, we open space for new ecological solidarities and transformative urban politics. The Cape Flats, with its entangled histories and ecologies, offers fertile ground for rethinking the relationships between people, plants, and place. Through speculative interventions, we can begin to envision a future where the boundaries between nature and culture dissolve, and the post-colonial city becomes a site of co-creation, resilience, and mutual care.

Plants as Protagonists



Digitally manipulated
Fynbos monoprints and
monoprint tracings. Made
by author and Fynbos

Plants as Protagonists

In this chapter we come back to the Fynbos as central to the project of this thesis, as inclusion of Fynbos plants as agents of change within speculative futures introduces an element of fiction-friction that can catalyse the imagining of new futures for the territory. In the first chapter the reader was introduced to the Fynbos plants, as resilient, protean plants that have adapted to thrive in precarity. For this thesis, they are the representatives of the more-than-human world, with which the territory, its human inhabitants and the conditions of exclusion, inequality and alienation exist in a complex relationship.

Michael Marder suggests that humanity urgently needs a comparative analysis of human and plant construction of and interaction with space. We need to ask:

How do plants make sense of the places they inhabit?”

For non-sessile beings like humans, our sense of “here” is transitory. The moment we move from the “here” of a moment ago, it becomes the “there” of the present. Thus, if a space that we used to inhabit becomes destroyed, we will survive its destruction. However, we will have to put our relation to the space into perspective and thus also the spaces we occupy or circulate between into relation. With plants, the “here” is always put into relation with the self, because plants cannot leave the place in which they grow.¹ Thus, we could learn a lot from plants about living on a damaged planet, or as Haraway and Tsing suggests how to stay with the trouble² and

¹ Michael Marder, “The Place of Plants: Spatiality, Movement, Growth,” *Performance Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2015): 186.

² Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016).



Digital trace of monoprint of Fynbos leaves, made by author and Fynbos

³ Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

⁴ *Fynbos Futures* is fictional fiction novel, chapters of which were written specifically for this thesis.

how to inhabit the ruins.

The chapter begins with a discussion on the place of plants in current post-human, post-natural and post-colonial discourse. The work of Michael Marder on plant intelligence and Stefano Mancuso will also be briefly discussed. Following from this, as a brief interlude, Emmanuelle Coccia's theories on plant life in his book *The Life of Plants, A Metaphysics of Mixture*³ will be presented and analysed. Similar to Coccia's leaf, root and flower theory, this thesis, through an investigation into qualities of vegetal lives, propose instead three characteristics of the worlding of Fynbos plants, namely amphibiousness, contamination and temporality. By investigating three characteristics of Fynbos life, amphibiousness, contamination, and temporality, the thesis speculates on how plants can actively shape space and influence human relationships with the land. The chapter bridges the theoretical and the speculative, by presenting these characteristics as an appendix on the lives of Fynbos belonging *Fynbos Futures*⁴, the fictional novel, imagined as a methodological tool for the project of this thesis. This chapter means to set the reader up for the fictional narratives to come, wherein the existing tendencies of the site, the infrastructures of alienation and the principles of fynbos life are combined to speculate on an alternative future for the Cape Flats. By including the Fynbos plants and the more-than-human world into the methodology of imagining speculative futures, exclusionary, alienating and anthropocentric ideologies are challenged.

Thinking with Plants

The rise of posthuman perspectives in the humanities has destabilised the long-standing anthropocentric belief that humans are the sole agents of change, particularly by recognising more-than-human agency. Historically, scientific and socio-scientific research has treated humans as active subjects and more-than-humans as passive objects. Research was conducted on more-than-humans, not with them, a process devoid of reciprocity or respect.⁵ However, recent academic efforts, rooted in post-human, post-natural and ecological thinking, have sought to allow more-than-humans to actively participate in research processes.⁶ Scholars like Donna Haraway emphasize the importance of interspecies relationships and the need to move beyond human-centred research paradigms⁷, while Anna Tsing's studies on fungi offer models for incorporating nonhumans as active participants in knowledge production.⁸

Plant/Alien/Other

Despite these efforts of inclusion, plants remain particularly marginalised even within discourses that acknowledge more-than-human agency. Animals often serve as familiar, anthropomorphic entry points into posthuman thought⁹, whereas plants are relegated to the background of human concerns, seen merely as resources or decorative elements in human environments¹⁰. This marginalisation stems from a difficulty in relating to the plant "other."¹¹ Their inscrutable nature, sessile existence, and simple anatomy make plants appear alien from a human perspective. Yet, this very alterity invites a radical rethinking of human-plant relationships, challenging entrenched philosophical, ecological, and

ethical frameworks.¹²

Thinking with plants requires a profound shift from seeing them as passive objects to recognizing them as active agents shaping our shared world. This thesis, through its engagement with the critically endangered Cape Flats Sand Fynbos and its entanglement with the peripheral Cape Flats, argues that rethinking vegetal life, and all more-than-human life, has become imperative in the face of socio-economic and ecological crises. The marginalization of plants in human-centred narratives mirrors the treatment of subaltern human groups in postcolonial theory. Both are rendered invisible and denied voice and agency in shaping their destinies.¹³



Figure 4.1 The alien looking *Erasanthe henrici*, an Orchid from Madagascar, photographed by Steven Beckendorf

5
Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

6
Giovanni Aloï and Michael Marder, "Getting Entwined: A Foray into Philosophy's and Art's Affair with Plants," *E-Flux*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/552884/getting-entwined-a-foray-into-philosophy-s-and-art-s-affair-with-plants>.

7
See for example Haraway's work: *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008); *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (N.C.); London: Duke University Press, 2016); *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

8
Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

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Giovanni Aloï and Michael Marder, "Getting Entwined: A Foray into Philosophy's and Art's Affair with Plants," *E-Flux*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/552884/getting-entwined-a-foray-into-philosophy-s-and-art-s-affair-with-plants>.

10
Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 3.

11
Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

12
Giovanni Aloï and Michael Marder, "Getting Entwined: A Foray into Philosophy's and Art's Affair with Plants," *E-Flux*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/552884/getting-entwined-a-foray-into-philosophy-s-and-art-s-affair-with-plants>.

13
Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

14
Ibid.

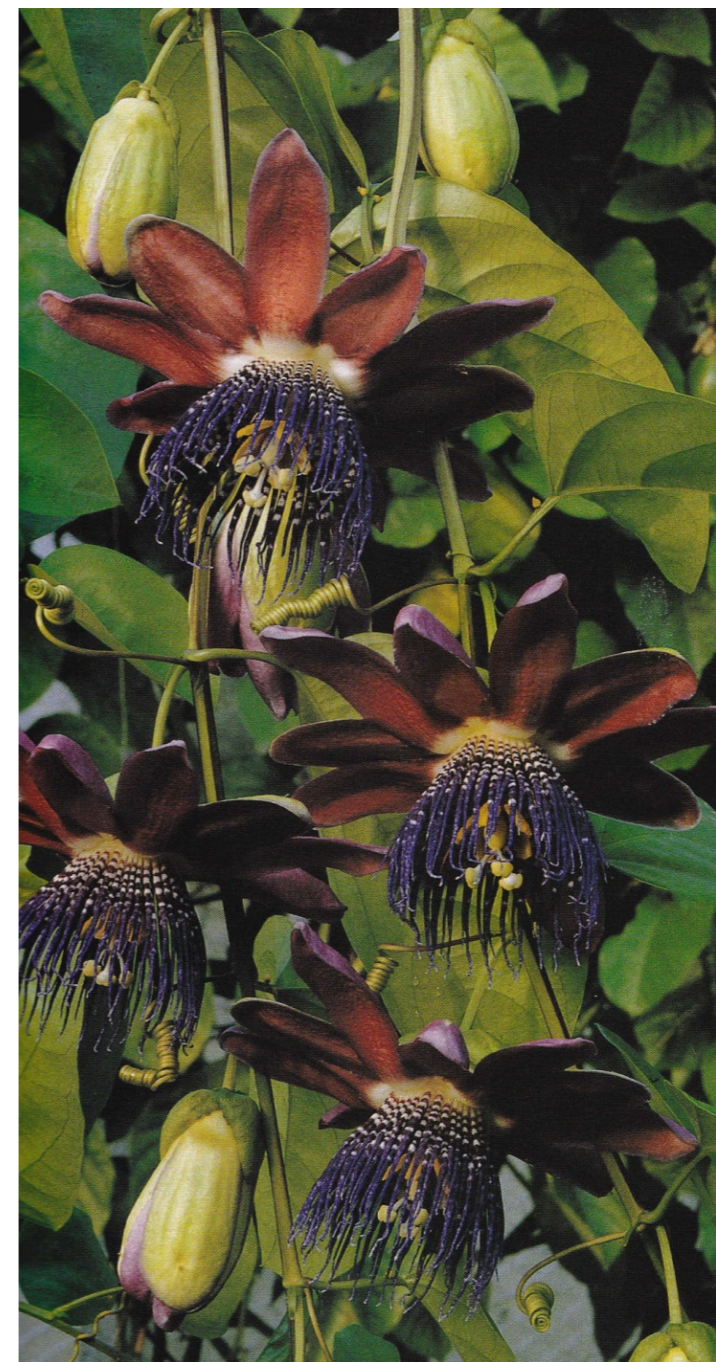


Figure 4.2 Photograph from *The Garden Magazine*, volume 122, June 1997

14
Giovanni Aloï and Michael Marder, "Getting Entwined: A Foray into Philosophy's and Art's Affair with Plants," *E-Flux*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/552884/getting-entwined-a-foray-into-philosophy-s-and-art-s-affair-with-plants>.

15
Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 192.

16
Matthew Gandy, *Natura Urbana* (MIT Press, 2022).

17
Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 192.

In this context, plants can be seen as subaltern in both environmental and social discourses. Like marginalized human groups, plants have been silenced and rendered invisible in decisions that profoundly impact their existence. Urban planning, environmental policy, and scientific research have historically treated plants as passive resources, overlooking their active roles in ecosystems.¹⁴ By framing plants as alien/other in this thesis, I advocate for their inclusion in ethical and political considerations. Just as recognizing the agency of marginalised human communities is imperative and requires a shift in perception, so too does acknowledging the agency of plants.

Dissolving Dualisms

Plants challenge many of the binaries underpinning Western thought: subject/object, inner/outer, life/death, and individual/collective. They embody interconnectedness and entanglement, reminding us that life is a relational process rather than an isolated phenomenon. By attending to plants, we can disrupt dualistic narratives and reconsider what it means to exist within a multispecies world.¹⁵ This shift is particularly crucial in contemporary urban political ecology, where plants play vital roles in shaping environments and challenging human-centred policies and planning practices, despite nature typically not being accepted as being a part of the urban condition.¹⁶

Indigenous Ontologies

As discussed, in *Beyond Nature and Culture*, Philippe Descola argues that relational ontologies, ways of understanding the world that emphasize interconnectedness and interdependence, have long existed outside the Western framework.¹⁷

In the South African, Khoi San¹⁸ tradition, plants are seen as passive entities but as cosmic mediators, active participants in the spiritual and physical realms. In Khoisan belief, plants serve as an axis mundi, a bridge between different planes of existence. Shamans or healers can connect to these realms by interacting with plants, which act as conduits to the spirit world:

“Like a waterhole, a tree is itself a mediator of realms in that its roots are below and its branches are above the plane of daily life. At another level, the role of a healer or “n/om k”xausi” parallels that of trees and plants as both can link various realms of existence, the earth, the sky and the underground.”

Here, plants are seen as symbolic of the connection between the earthly and the spiritual, the mundane and the divine. Their roots anchor them in the earth, while their branches reach toward the heavens, making them powerful mediators between the physical and metaphysical worlds (figure 4.3).¹⁹ The Khoisan ontology is one of animism, where the distinction between human and non-human is not absolute; rather, all entities, humans, plants, rivers, are seen as alive and imbued with their own consciousness and agency.²⁰

This worldview fosters a deep sense of continuity between humans and other being, creating a relational and reciprocal bond between people, plants, animals, and the world. Relational ontologies invites a reassessment of our connection to territories. Rather than viewing plants as resources to be exploited or passive objects, we can begin to see them as active agents in the world, deeply embedded in a web of relationships that shape our environment and our understanding of existence. By embracing these ontologies, we can challenge the boundaries that separate us from the non-human world and foster a more inclusive, multispecies understanding of life, where plants are recognized as equal participants in world-making.

Plants as Storytellers

Urban landscapes, often shaped by colonial legacies, bear hidden histories of exploitation, dispossession, and social injustice, and plants have been both witnesses to and victims of these processes.²¹ This is exemplified by the alienated Cape Flats and the critically endangered condition of the Flats Fynbos. By considering plants as active agents rather than passive backdrops, we uncover these hidden histories and recognise their entanglement with human actions.²² Plants communicate through growth patterns, responses to environmental changes, and interactions with other species.²³ These forms of communication, though nonverbal, disrupt human expectations of agency and expression, demanding a more inclusive, multispecies understanding of language and interaction. Robin Wall Kimmerer, in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, illustrates this shift by asking

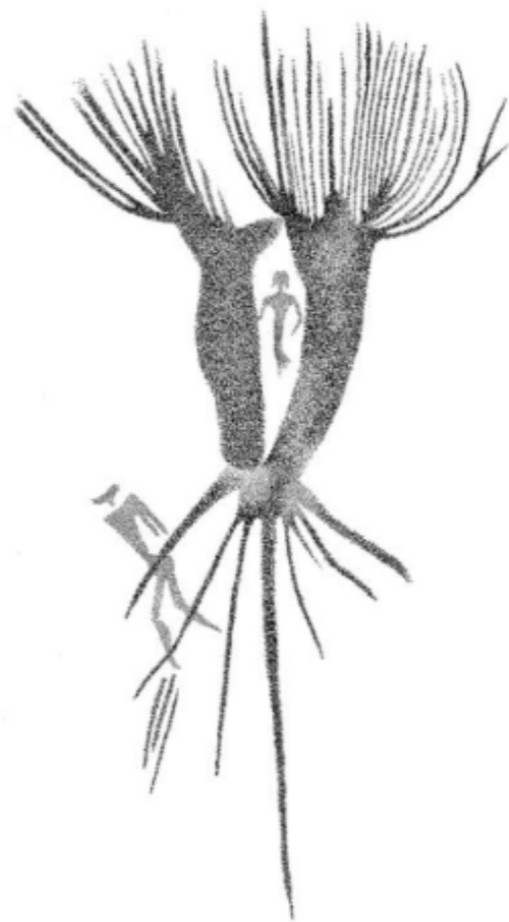


Figure 4.3 Drawing of a Khoisan cave painting *A Tree, Two Human Figures, One between the stems and Another on the Roots* redrawn by Siyakha Mguni for his thesis on San ritual¹⁸

¹⁸ Khoisan refers to the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa who are primarily distinguished by their use of click languages. The Khoisan are made up of two main groups: the Khoikhoi (historically pastoralists) and the San (traditionally hunter-gatherers). Both groups share a deep connection with the natural world, with a spiritual cosmology that incorporates animistic beliefs and a holistic view of the interconnectedness between humans, plants, animals, and the land.

¹⁹ Siyakha Mguni, “Continuity and Change in San Belief and Ritual” (Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts, The University of Witwatersrand for the degree of Master of Arts, 2002), 170.

²⁰ Philippe Descola, *Beyond Nature and Culture* (Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 5.

²¹ Giovanni Aloï and Michael Marder, “Getting Entwined: A Foray into Philosophy’s and Art’s Affair with Plants,” *E-Flux*, August 8, 2023, <https://www.e-flux.com/notes/552884/getting-entwined-a-foray-into-philosophy-s-and-art-s-affair-with-plants>.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Stefano Mancuso, *The Incredible Journey of Plants* (Other Press, LLC, 2020).

²⁴ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 128-129.

²⁵ Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003).

²⁶ Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think: Toward an Anthropology beyond the Human* (Berkeley, London: University Of California Press, 2013).

²⁷ Ait-Touati Frédérique, Arènes Alexandra, and Grégoire Axelle, *Terra Forma: A Book of Speculative Maps*, trans. Amanda DeMarco (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: The MIT Press, 2022), Pg. 31.

²⁸ Cheryl McEwan, “Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023): 1130.



Figure 4.4 Illustration of the *Bulbophyllum* orchid by Elizabeth Ann Buckleberry, 2008



Figure 4.4 Photograph *Droseras in bud* by photographer Helene Schmitz

how plants, devoid of human language, would communicate. She suggests that they would do so through movement, growth, and presence: “What if you had no language at all and yet there was something you needed to say? Wouldn’t you dance it? Wouldn’t you act it out? Wouldn’t your every movement tell the story?” Kimmerer’s insights emphasize the need to attune ourselves to embodied forms of communication, to learn to “listen” to plants through their responses to environmental changes and their ecological interactions.²⁴

Thinking with Plants

The recognition of plants’ agency challenges anthropocentric views of communication and intelligence. Donna Haraway’s concept of “companion species”²⁵ and Eduardo Kohn’s notion of “how forests think”²⁶ expand our understanding of nonhuman agency and sentience. These frameworks invite us to see plants as communicative beings that engage in meaningful exchanges with other species and the abiotic world. For example, plants communicate through chemical signals, root networks, and symbiotic relationships with fungi and bacteria, forms of communication that transcend human verbal language and reveal complex ecological interactions. Recognizing these forms of communication opens up new possibilities for life on a damaged planet. Attending to plants as storytellers can help us rethink urban planning policies and conservation practices that have historically been shaped by colonial legacies.²⁷ Instead of treating nature as a resource to be managed or commodified, we can embrace a relational approach that acknowledges the intrinsic value and agency of plants. This shift can foster more just futures by challenging the exploitation and commodification of the natural world.²⁸ From an ethical perspective, giving plants a “voice” means recognizing their forms of communication and incorporating their needs and roles into human decision-making

processes.²⁹ This recognition aligns with posthuman critiques of anthropocentrism, which call for expanding ethical and political frameworks to include nonhuman beings.

By thinking with plants, we move beyond human-centered narratives and cultivate a deeper sense of responsibility and interconnectedness with the natural world. As Kimmerer reminds us, “Plants answer questions by the way they live, by their responses to change; you just need to learn how to ask.”³⁰ To think with plants is to learn from their modes of being, to recognize their capacity to adapt, grow, and thrive in diverse environments. It is to acknowledge their role as active participants in world-making. By embracing this perspective, we can begin to dismantle the boundaries that separate humans from the natural world and envision more inclusive, multispecies futures.³¹

A philosophical, Scientific and Speculative perspective: Marder and Mancuso

Plants are increasingly being recognised not merely as passive elements of the environment but as active participants in shaping space and life. Here I'd like to present the work of two authors, who although coming from different fields, philosophy and biology have spotlighted plants in their work.

Michael Marder, in his explorations of plant intelligence, emphasizes the ethical and philosophical implications of plant life. He argues that plants exhibit forms of responsiveness and relationality that challenge human-centred notions of cognition. Rather than attributing traditional consciousness to plants, Marder invites us to rethink intelligence as an embodied and distributed process, rooted in plants' capacity to adapt and interact with their environments in meaningful ways. His work draws from the concept of thinking-with-plants, which emphasises the non-anthropocentric forms of intelligence that plants embody. Unlike animals, whose intelligence is often linked to mobility and consciousness, plants exhibit a form of spatial intelligence that is deeply

embedded in their rootedness and their response to the environment. For Marder, plants are not passive entities; they engage with and respond to their surroundings in ways that reveal a complex, non-verbal form of intelligence that shapes their growth and interaction with space.³²

Similarly, neurobiologist, Stefano Mancuso, explores plant intelligence in how plants exhibit complex behaviours and signalling mechanisms in response to their environments. He emphasises that plant intelligence is not the same as human cognition but instead manifests through distributed networks of perception and response. Mancuso's work focuses on the ways plants interact with their surroundings through chemical, electrical, and mechanical signals, highlighting their capacity to adapt to environmental changes without the need for a central nervous system. His research on plant communication, especially through the root system, highlights plants' capacity to perceive, react, and even remember environmental changes. Mancuso's theory



Figure 4.1 Flannel Flowers, Close up photography by photographer Elizabeth Hosking

29 Cheryl McEwan, "Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023): 1120.

30 Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 158.

31 Cheryl McEwan, "Multispecies Storytelling in Botanical Worlds: The Creative Agencies of Plants in Contested Ecologies," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 6, no. 2 (July 2023): 1130.

32 See: Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), Michael Marder, "A Philosophy of Stories Plants Tell," *Narrative Culture* 10, no. 2 (August 5, 2023): 189–205, and Michael Marder, "The Place of Plants: Spatiality, Movement, Growth," *Performance Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2015): 185.

33 Stefano Mancuso, *The Revolutionary Genius of Plants: A New Understanding of Plant Intelligence and Behavior* (New York, NY: Atria Books, An Imprint Of Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2018).

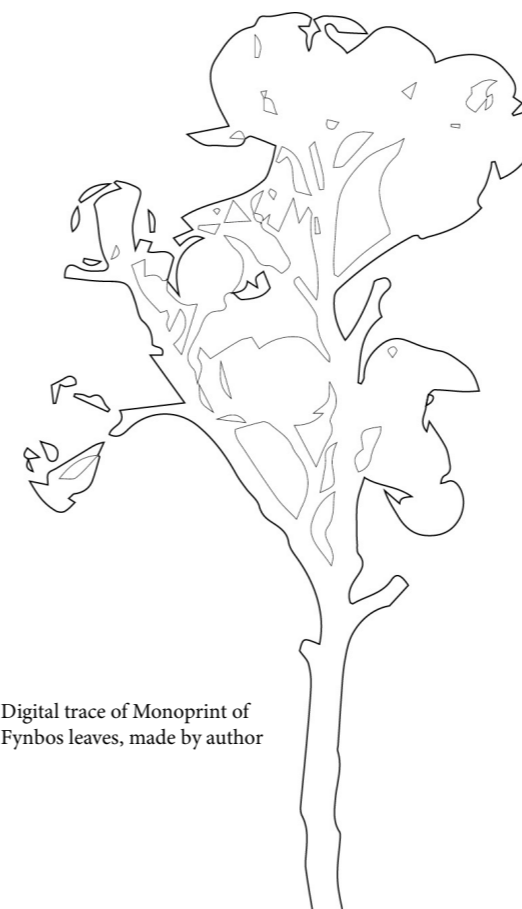
34 Stefano Mancuso, *Brilliant Green: The Surprising History and Science of Plant Intelligence* (Washington: Island Press, 2015).

35 Stefano Mancuso, *The Nation of Plants*, trans. Gregory Conti (New York, NY: Other Press Llc, 2021).

51



Figure 4.1 Foggy Vines by Frank Tellez



Digital trace of Monprint of Fynbos leaves, made by author

of plant neurobiology introduces the notion of plant adaptive behaviour and signalling as processes distributed across plant networks, rather than being centralized in a brain, as in animals. While some interpret these processes as intelligence, Mancuso focuses on how plants perceive and respond to their environments through decentralized systems.³³

In the terms of plant spatiality, Mancuso's work emphasises the way plants create and alter space through their physiological and spatial processes. The root systems, for instance, are not just mechanical anchors but also active participants in the transformation of the soil environment. The roots form networks that alter the soil's structure, chemistry, and composition, facilitating nutrient cycling and creating niches for other organisms. Above ground, plants' growth patterns, from the twisting of vines to the expansion of forests, demonstrate a continual reshaping of space, altering the environment to suit their needs and fostering interspecies relationships in the process.³⁴

This thesis is not the first to propose the use of fictional narratives and speculations to challenge the existing paradigm. In *The Nation of Plants*, Mancuso, moves away from purely scientific work and takes on a theory-fiction exploration where he imagines a world governed by plant intelligence, challenging traditional anthropocentric narratives. In this fictional story he presents the constitution as it would be re-written by plants. As example, article 3 of this new constitution states:

“The Nation of Plants shall not recognise animal hierarchies, founded on command centres and centralised functions, and shall foster diffuse and decentralised vegetable democracies.”³⁵



Figure 4.9 Artwork by Deb Stoner as part of her "Garden Studies" Series



Figure 4.10 Artwork by Deb Stoner as part of her "Garden Studies" Series

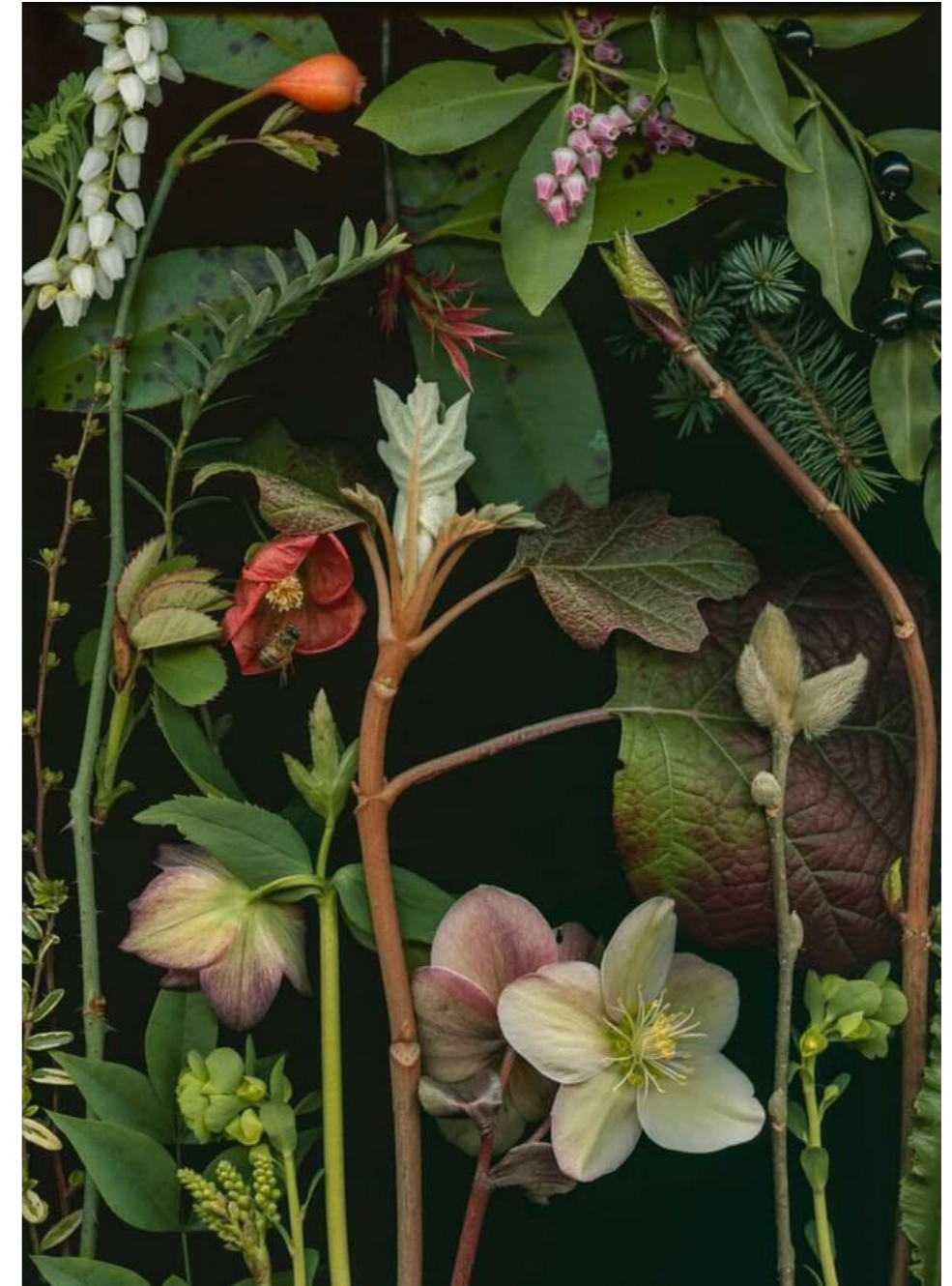


Figure 4.11 Artwork by Deb Stoner as part of her "Garden Studies" Series

Coccia's Metaphysics of mixture

In this next section Emanuele Coccia's theories on plant life in his book *The Life of Plants, a Metaphysics of Mixture*, will be presented and discussed. His three distinct theories "Leaf Theory", "Theory of the Root" and "Theory of the Flower", highlight different aspects of plant life and their implications for understanding the metaphysics and politics of life. Coccia's work is important for this thesis as it informs the speculation on plants as spatial agents and inspired the creation of three alternative theories for fynbos life that will be presented at the end of the chapter.

In the book, Coccia takes a speculative approach to botany, in which he acknowledges plants as cosmic actors. According to him, plants show us how intimately a being can interact with its environment. So intimately in fact, that there is no interaction but rather a kind of mixing together, as pointed out in the subtitle of the book: *A metaphysics of Mixture*. He writes that because plants are non-sessile beings they are exposed to their environment to the point of merging with it.³⁶ Plants take elements of the world such as sunlight and water and transforms these elements into themselves. Simultaneously, the world is transformed by this exchange, constantly being remade by the plant. "They transform everything they touch into life," Coccia asserts,

"they [plants] make out of matter, air, and sunlight what, for the rest of the living, will be a space of habitation, a world."³⁷

He proposes that their complete immersion and adhesion to this world, including all human and more-than-human interaction, necessarily dictates that they should occupy the principle position from which we analyse life. He writes that

"to interrogate plants means to understand what it means to be in the world."³⁸

Leaf Theory: The atmosphere of the World

Coccia's leaf theory presents a cosmological view of plants, in which he positions leaves as central to the world making process. According to him, plants participate in the creation of the world through their interactions with air, light and time. Through his theory of leaves he asserts that plants have architectural agency and are fundamentally relational and interconnected beings.³⁹

Permeable

For Coccia, leaves are not only a vital, functional organ for plant life, but instead represent the very essence of a plant's relationship with the world. Plants lack a rigid border between themselves and their environment, because they are constantly

³⁶ *Ibid.* 14.
³⁷ *Ibid.* 8.
³⁸ Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 5.
³⁹ For this section See: Emanuele Coccia, "Leaf Theory: The Atmosphere of the World", *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 25-76.

⁴⁰ Bruno Latour, *We Have Modern* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 41.
Emanuele Coccia, *TI: A Metaphysics of M*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 42.
Emanuele Coccia, *T*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 42.

participating in a mutual exchange with the world. Leaves exemplify this porosity, because they are the interface of exchange between a plant and the atmosphere. He claims that through the leaf, plants are in the world and making the world simultaneously. His theory of immersion, in which there is no environment separate from the self, recalls Bruno Latour's words discussed as part of the breakdown of the Nature/Culture dichotomy



Digital trace of monprint of Fynbos leaves, made by author and Fynbos

in the introduction of this thesis: "The idea of an environment scarcely makes any sense since you [vous] can never draw a boundary line that would distinguish an organism from what surrounds it."⁴⁰

Coccia does well to prove his argument of immersion in discussing the act of creating breath, in which plants take part. To him, the entire world consists of the atmosphere, as it is what allows life. Coccia acknowledges that leaves are the organs through which plants breathe and that through their breath they contribute to the breathability of the world. Thus, the leaf is connected to the air, the ultimate commons, or as Coccia calls it the soul of the world. Because plants are so intimately tied with the atmosphere, he argues that plants are in fact a part of the atmosphere. He writes: "Imagine being made of the same substance as the world that surrounds you; being of the same nature as music—a series of vibrations of the air, like a jellyfish, which is no more than a thickening of water."⁴¹

Furthermore, leaf theory shows us the futility of thinking in terms of objects, because plants are immersed beings in a fluid world in constant exchange. Thus, the relationship between subject and object becomes irrelevant, because the material distinction disappears:

"Permeability is the key word: in this world, everything is in everything."⁴²

Coccia takes the leaf and turns it into a broader model for thinking about life itself, as an interplay between passivity and activity. Leaves respond to the world, they adapt to it and are shaped by it, just as the world is shaped by them. Coccia emphasizes that leaves do not impose their will on the world but become a part of it, integrating themselves into the broader system of life. By absorbing light and producing oxygen, plants contribute to the conditions of life for all beings, participating in a web of existence that is beyond that of any individual organism. Thus, reflecting on ways in which all beings can live in a world where commons are shared.

Cosmic

Leaves are used to propose Coccia's cosmological thinking, where plants are part of a universal process. He writes that through photosynthesis plants participate in a cosmic economy of energy exchange. This process ties the plant to the sun, making the leaf a cosmic entity. According to Coccia, leaves dissolve the boundary between being and world and creates a zone of interaction, where life and the cosmos meet. This challenges Western Metaphysical tradition that conceptualises beings as isolated entities within a larger, external world. Instead, Coccia suggest that life (represented by the leaf) is always relational and always part of the cosmic totality. Coccia's cosmological thinking is also ecological, in that it emphasizes the co-dependence of all living beings. Plants, humans, animals, and even microorganisms all rely on the same atmosphere, the same energy from the sun, and the same material conditions for life. The leaf, in this sense, becomes a symbol for the universal participation of life in the world. Rather than thinking of life as a hierarchy with humans at the top, Coccia's leaf theory suggests a flattened ontology in which all beings, through their participation in the cosmos, contribute equally to the life of the planet.

Temporal

A final crucial element in Coccia's thinking with leaves is the relationship between leaves and

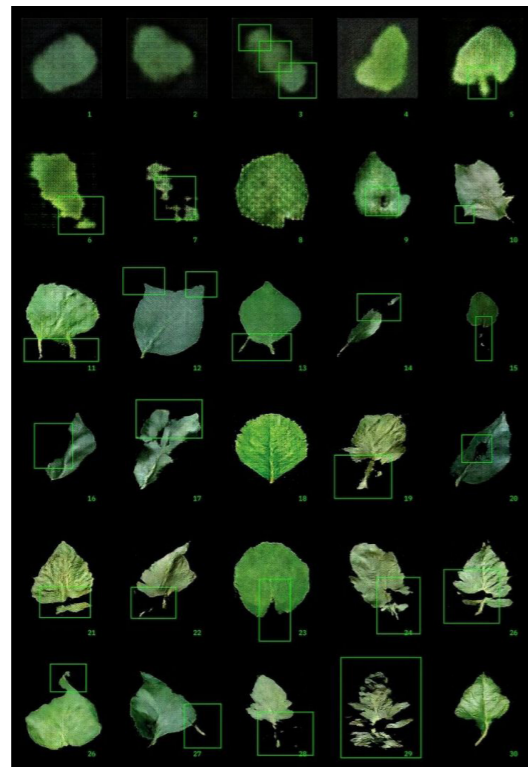
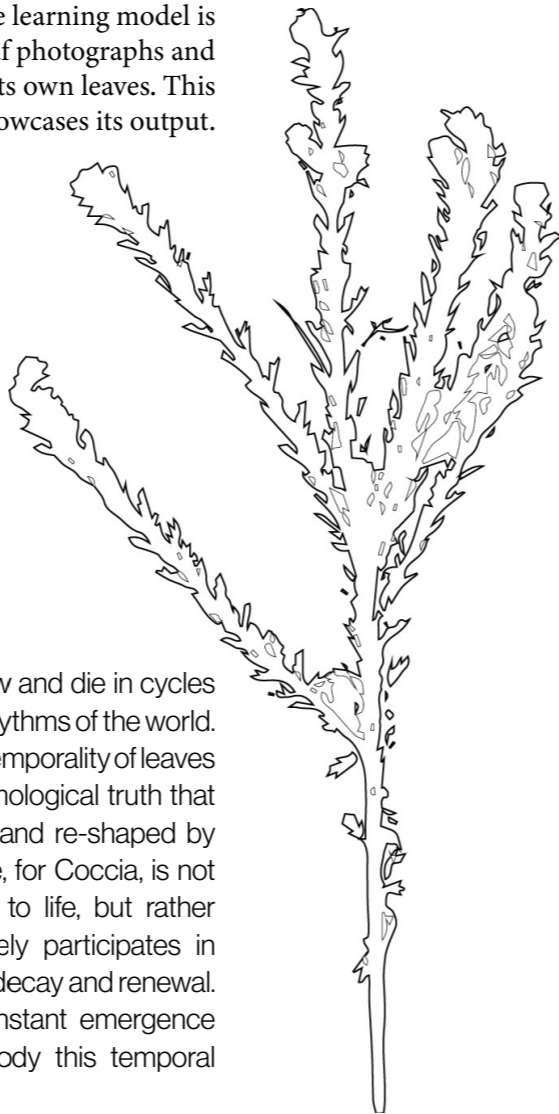


Figure 4.11 *FAUX FOLIAGE* by Aarati Akkapeddi. A machine learning model is trained on a dataset of leaf photographs and slowly learns to produce its own leaves. This print of "specimens" showcases its output.

Digital trace of Monoprint of Fynbos leaves, made by author and Fynbos

time. Leaves emerge, grow and die in cycles that reflect the seasonal rhythms of the world. According to Coccia, the temporality of leaves represents a deeper cosmological truth that life is continually shaped and re-shaped by temporal processes. Time, for Coccia, is not something that happens to life, but rather something that life actively participates in through cycles of growth, decay and renewal. Leaves, through their constant emergence and disappearance embody this temporal reality.

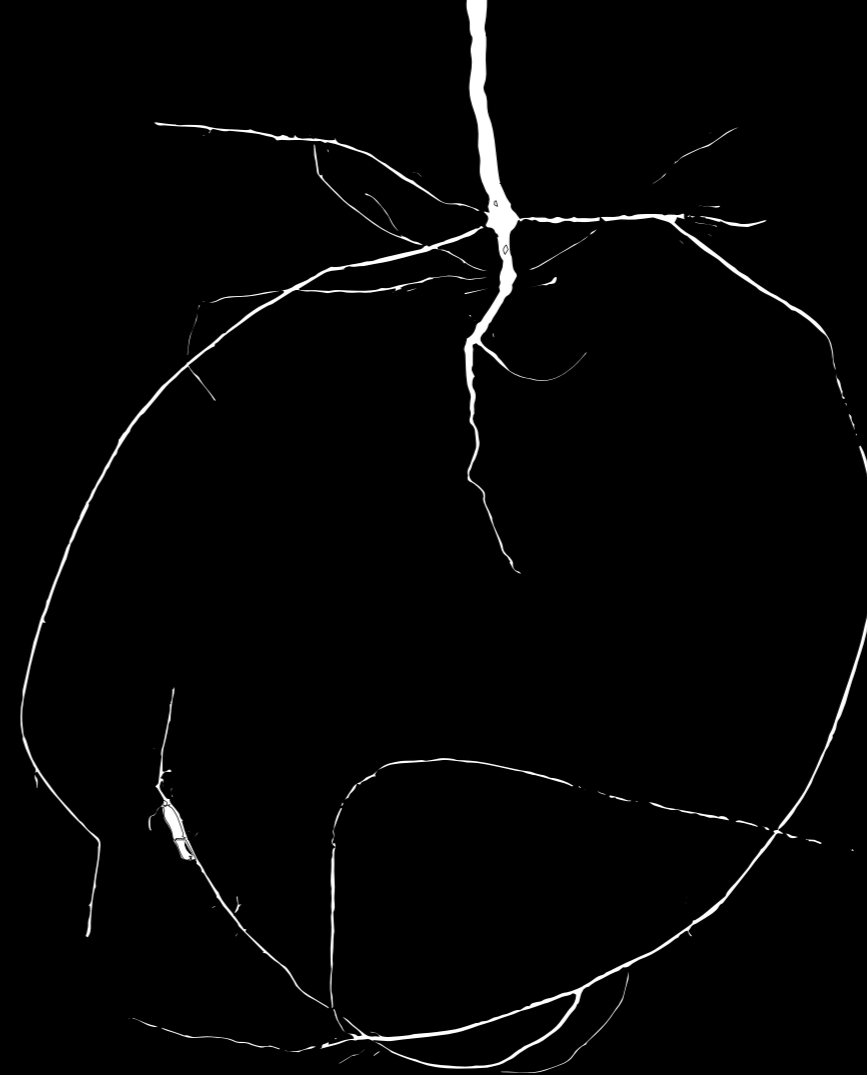


Root Theory: The Life of the Stars

In *Theory of the Root*, Coccia positions roots as essential elements of plant life that offer insights into the relational, spatial and cosmological dimensions of life. He proposes that the roots represent the most fundamental aspect of plant life, its hybrid nature. Plants exist simultaneously above and below ground. Thus, creating relations and entanglement both between different realms of life and between different organisms. Furthermore, through the growth of roots in soil, the space-making capacities of plants become evident.⁴³

Amphibious

Coccia begins his theory by establishing the root as the foundation of plant life. The root, for Coccia, is the point at which life physically and metaphorically entangles with the world. It represents an intense intimacy with the earth and demonstrates in a concrete way how life is embedded in a space and how the space shapes life and it shapes the space in turn. This is a key part of Coccia's cosmological thinking: roots are not just in the world; they make world through their material connections to the earth. While leaves extend upwards into the air and towards sunlight, roots move in the opposite direction, into the soil and its darkness. This dual movement leads Coccia to describe plants as cosmic mediators that connect the different planes of existence. They act as bridges between the earth and the sky, darkness and light and the invisible and the visible. Thus, Coccia describe plants as "ontologically amphibious" beings, who possess a double character and are fundamentally hybrid.⁴⁴ This theory of plants as amphibious and hybrid is one of Coccia's most profound concepts and truly suggests an entangled way of understanding the world, going beyond what is found on the surface of life.



Digital trace of monoprint of Fynbos roots, made by author and Fynbos

Coccia's leaf theory is interesting for this thesis because it turns the leaf into an active agent in shaping the world. To him, the plant becomes an architect, not only of this world, but of the cosmos. His account of the porosity of leaves furthers the idea that there is no border between life and the self, thus, refuting the idea of the environment as a container and ultimately tying all beings, human and more-than, into cosmic unity.

43
For this section See: Emanuele Coccia, "Theory of the Root: The Life of the Stars", *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 77-98.

44
Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J. Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 81.

Relational

Coccia sees the plant as the embodiment of mediation, pointing to the ways in which life is always relational. Roots do not only belong to the plant, but they also merge the plant with the soil, groundwater and other organisms. Like the leaf who is in the atmosphere but also is the atmosphere, the root is in the soil and is the soil. Coccia takes this concept even further by arguing that to understand the earth, a planet that revolves around the sun, we must do away with the earth/sky dichotomy and replace it with the understanding that “there is nothing but sky everywhere”⁴⁵ He writes that the cosmos is not an *oikos*⁴⁶ but an *ouranos*.⁴⁷ Thus, a plant root is soil and soil is atmosphere. He suggests that the rooting of a plant into the earth’s soil is the penetration of the sun into the earth. As the plant grows towards the sun above ground, its secret second body, the root is mirroring this movement in the opposite direction as an extension of solar energy.

The relationality of roots is extended to the interconnected relations plants share with each other and other organisms inhabiting the soil. Through their connections, roots create a vast underground network that mirrors the above-ground interactions of other plant structures. The root, as a connector, dissolves the boundaries between the plant and its environment, illustrating Coccia’s broader theme that life is fundamentally entangled.

Spatial

Another theme that is addressed in *Theory of the Root* is the spatial dimension of roots and how they relate to the plant’s existence within a particular place. Coccia writes that roots have a dynamic relationship with the soil, actively shaping the space around them. As they grow, roots penetrate and transform the soil, altering the landscape both physically and chemically. Here, Coccia is giving spatial agency, or architectural capacities, directly to the plant. This is significant, and strays very far from the anthropocentric view of humans as the sole creators of space. For Coccia, the architecture of plants is a model for how life interacts with the world. Roots are not passive

recipients of nutrients, they actively explore, change and redefine the spaces they inhabit. In this way plants participate in the making of space and the organisation of the world around them. Coccia’s cosmology here draws attention to the fact that life does not exist in a void; it exists in specific spaces that it helps to create. The root is a metaphor for this active spatial engagement, challenging the idea that organisms are simply passive inhabitants of a pre-existing world.

Coccia’s idea of roots as hybrid, amphibious and relational is extremely important to the hypothesis of this thesis. In order to acknowledge plants as agents in- and architects of the spaces they inhabit these concepts need to be accepted as characteristic of plant life. Thus, allowing for a theory of life as a web of entangled relations both above and below ground.

Digital trace of monoprint of Fynbos roots, made by author and Fynbos

⁴⁵ Ibid. 92
⁴⁶ In ancient Greek *oikos* refers to house, home and family.
⁴⁷ In ancient Greek *ouranos* means sky.
⁴⁸ For this section See: Emanuele Coccia, ‘Theory of the Flower: The Reason of forms’, *The Life of Plants. A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J Montanari (Cambridge, UK: Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 99-112.



Flower Theory: The Reason of Forms

Theory of the Flower delves into the philosophical and cosmological implications of flowers as complex, dynamic elements of plant life. Coccia presents flowers as metaphors for life’s visibility, relationality and temporality. Through their beauty, their role in reproduction, and their properties of attraction, flowers demonstrate the ways in which life is always engaged in a process of exchange, connection, and world-making.⁴⁸

Sensual

Where roots are the secret bodies of plants, flowers are the flamboyant parts of the plant structure. They invite interaction from the world around them. They embody the idea that life is not a private or self-contained affair, but unfolds in the commons, where

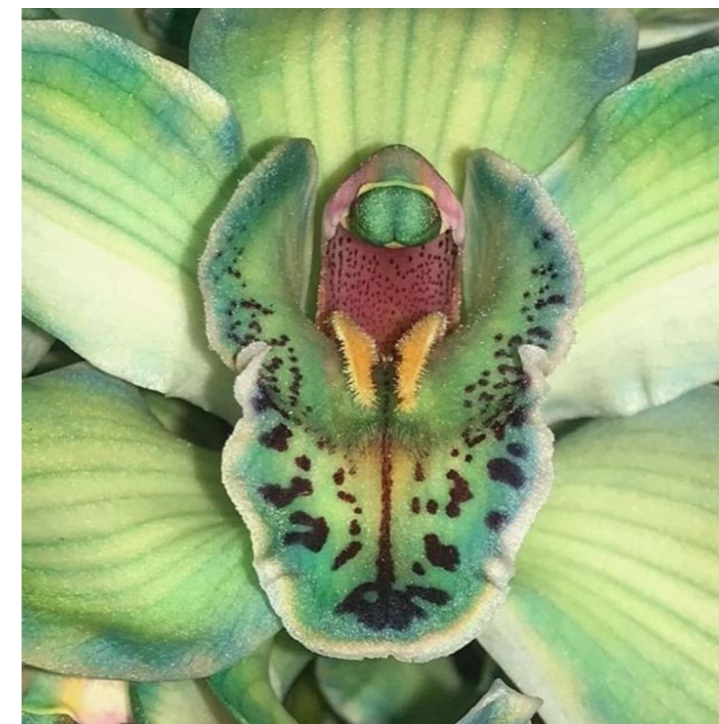


Figure 4.12 Photograph of a Cymbidium hybrid that’s been dyed blue/green.

connection is key. Coccia explores the flower’s sensuality and its role in attracting other beings. He argues that it is apparent through flowers that plants are not passive entities, they want to draw attention through their colour, fragrance and form. Coccia proposes that flowers are the clearest way in which plants communicate with the world. According to Coccia they reflect the central theme in his cosmological thinking: that life is always outward-facing and engaging with the world. Flowers are a form of life’s seduction, a way in which living beings reach out to the world, seeking connection and interaction.

Coccia also explores the idea that flowers are models of life’s openness to otherness. For him, flowers show that life is always oriented toward the other, always seeking to connect, to exchange and to engage with beings beyond itself. This idea challenges traditional notions of autonomy and self-containment, proposing instead a vision of life as something that thrives on connection and exchange. Coccia writes that flowers, in their openness to otherness, reveal the cosmological truth that life is always about engagement with the other, whether that other is another species, the world, or the cosmos.

Reciprocal

At the heart of Coccia’s *Theory of the Flower* is the idea that flowers play a crucial role in the process of worlding. According to him flowers are agents of world-making because they are sites of exchange. Flowers, Coccia explains, are the reproductive organs of the plants; they facilitate the exchange of pollen between individuals and species. However, Coccia goes beyond this biological function arguing that they represent a broader idea of exchange between beings and the world. Flowers attract pollinators, who then participate in the process of pollination, creating a system of reciprocity and interdependence. Thus, showing once again that life is fundamentally relational. Flowers, in their openness and visibility, invite interaction from the world, showing that life is not isolated but always engaged in exchanges with other forms of life and with the environment. In this

sense, the flower becomes a metaphor for the interconnectedness of all living beings, illustrating how life is sustained through a network of relationships. Coccia's cosmology here emphasizes that life is always involved in the process of shaping the world. Flowers, by connecting different species and by making life visible and attractive, participate in the ongoing creation of the world.

Ephemeral

Coccia also highlights the temporality of flowers, pointing out that they are inherently ephemeral. Unlike roots or leaves, which persist throughout a plant's lifetime, flowers are fleeting. They bloom for a short period and then they wither. This temporality, according to Coccia, is crucial to understanding the transient nature of life itself.

Fynbos as a Worlding Agent: The Amphibious, The Contaminated, and The Temporal

Borrowing from Emanuele Coccia's speculation on plants as ontologically amphibious beings, this thesis would like to propose that the architectures of plants are in themselves inherently amphibious and hybrid, because a plant is simultaneously creating spaces in two opposing planes.

Coccia's reflections on plant life, and the implications for human-plant relationships are interesting. For Coccia what we need to learn from vegetal lives, is that everything is connected and interdepend. This is the main argument of his metaphysical musings on leaves, roots and flowers. The way plants interact with the world, is not a simple aggregation of heterogeneous elements, but a true mixture of elements, whereafter there is no separating being and environment. He radically shifts the paradigm of nature, and plants by extension, as a passive backdrop or container for life to take place in. For him, relationality is the constituent that defines the world, and entities define themselves through their interactions with the world. His philosophy of "absolute interiority" nullifies any distinction between container and

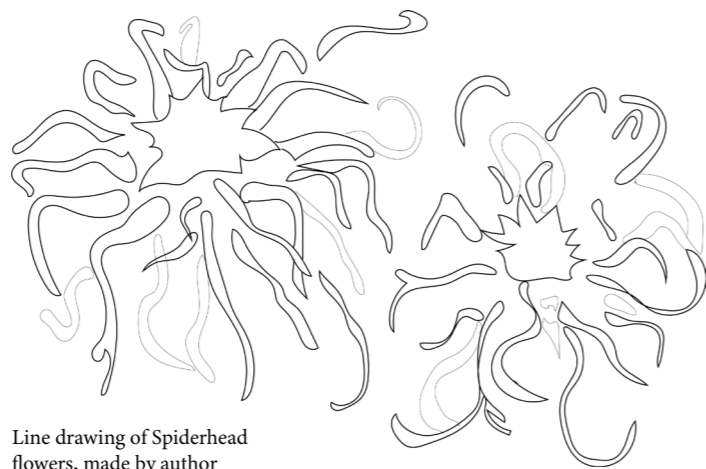
contained⁴⁹. All things are simultaneously contained and containers themselves. Which leads to viewing the world as dynamic, topological and relational. "The world is not a place", says Coccia, "it is a state of immersion of each thing in all other things."⁵⁰

This thesis takes from these metaphysical musings, and the structuring of Coccia's argument along the lines of a theory on leaves, roots and flowers, (and bounced against the writings of Marder and Mancuso, to create critical depth) and applies this to Fynbos plants and their acts of worlding. Grounded more in spatial and agential terms than the metaphysical, this thesis proposes three alternative characteristics of plants, through which to speculate on the territory of the Cape Flats: amphibious, temporal and contaminated.

Amphibious here, relating most to Coccia's theory of the root, and inspired by his words

：“...plants are ontologically amphibious beings⁵¹

they connect environments and spaces, showing that the relation between the living being and the environment cannot be conceived of in exclusive terms⁵² This conception of plants as amphibious beings, is given credit to Dov Koller, by Coccia. Koller in *The Restless Plant*, wrote:



Line drawing of Spiderhead flowers, made by author

49
Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019). Pg 13.
50
Ibid., 67.
51
On the notion of an ontological amphibian see: Eben Kirksey, *Emergent Ecologies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); and René ten Bos, "Towards an Amphibious Anthropology: Water and Peter Sloterdijk," *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 27, no. 1 (January 1, 2009): 73–86.
52
Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019). Pg 81.
53



Figure 4.12 Photograph of a Bonnet Orchid

“In this respect, all but very few plants are obligate amphibians, with part of their body permanently in the aerial environment and the remaining part within the soil.”⁵³

Which in turn inspired the Fynbos characteristic.

Contamination, as second characteristic is inspired by Coccia's speculations on immersion in the world, as proposed in the theory of leaves. Coccia writes that

Dov Koller, *The Restless Plant*, ed. Elizabeth van Volkenburgh (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1.
54
Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019). Pg 45.
55
Meiosis is a biological process of cell division that reduces the chromosome number by half, producing reproductive cells (gametes) with genetic variation. It enables the formation of seeds in plants, ensuring genetic diversity across generations.
56
Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants: A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019). Pg 102.

“...if organisms come to define their identity thanks to the life of other living beings, this is because each living being lives already, at once, in the life of others.”⁵⁴

Contamination, in fynbos lives refer to how inextricably tied they are to each other, to the soil, to the air and to other beings. They are never "pure" always "contaminated", they are not made of homogenic elements but always a mixture of elements, their own and that of others.

Lastly, the characteristic of Temporality in Fynbos takes cues from Coccia's reflections on flowers, particularly their ephemeral nature and seasonal cycles. Coccia writes that flowers mark the threshold where the individual and the species open themselves to mutation, change, and death. He describes the process of meiosis⁵⁵ in flowers as a moment where totality dissolves, allowing new life to emerge:

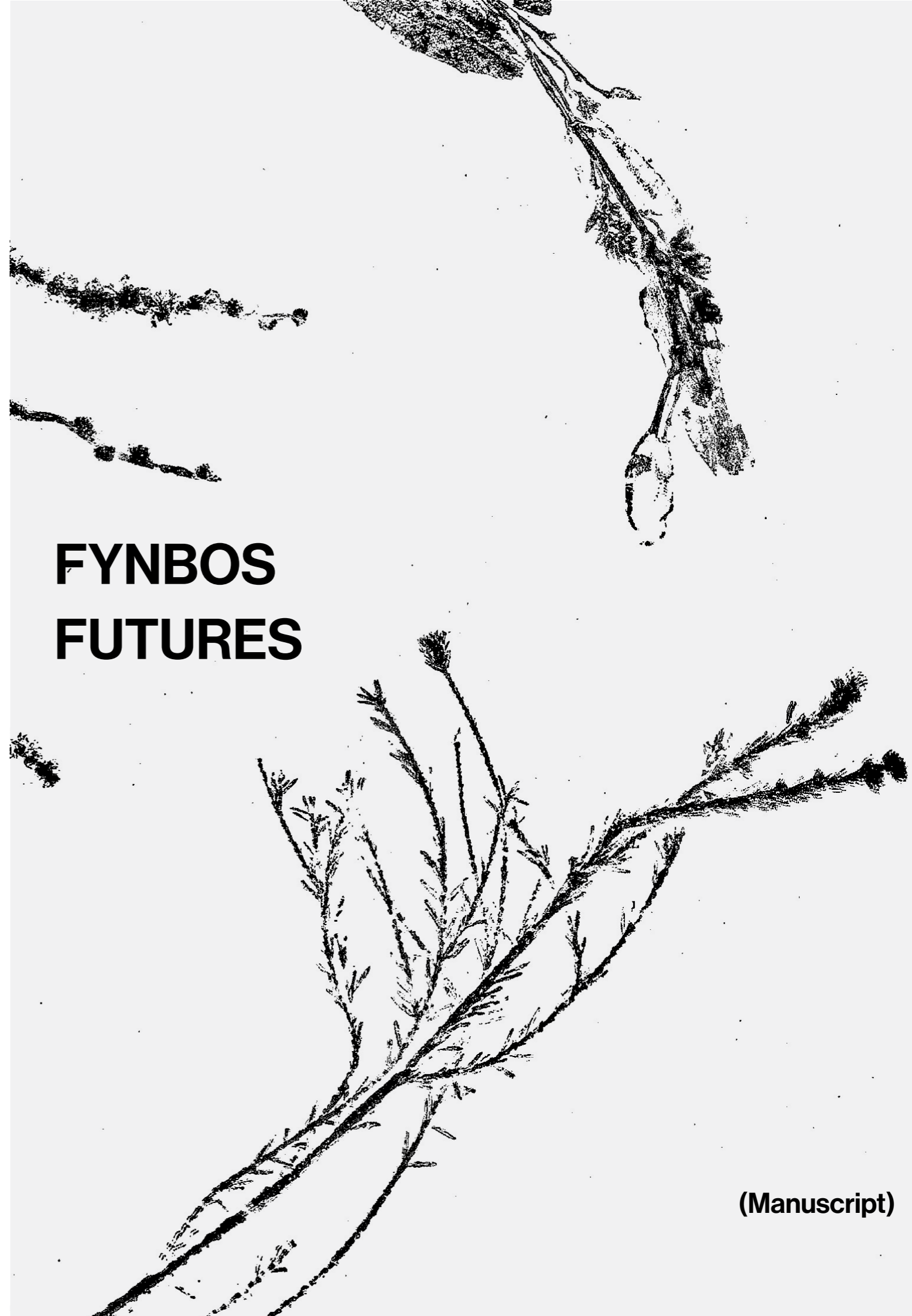
"At the heart of the flower, the totality of the organism as well as that of the species is decomposed and recomposed through the process of meiosis. Flowers are in this respect a place beyond totality, beyond the 'one for all'⁵⁶

This cyclical rhythm is mirrored in the temporal nature of Fynbos, tied to time, seasonality and cycles of growth, fire, and regeneration.

These characteristics will be discussed in full, in this next section. "Appendix B", takes on a theory-fiction tone. Here an informed speculation on characteristics of Fynbos lives, supported by academic work from authors such as Coccia and Marder, that could inspire alternative urban strategies, is presented as an appendix to the fictional fiction novel, *Fynbos Futures*, which is imagined as part of the methodological approach of the thesis. In the appendix the three speculative characteristics of Fynbos lives are proposed: amphibious, contaminated and temporal.



Line drawing tracing of Fynbos stem and flower monoprint, made by author and fynbos



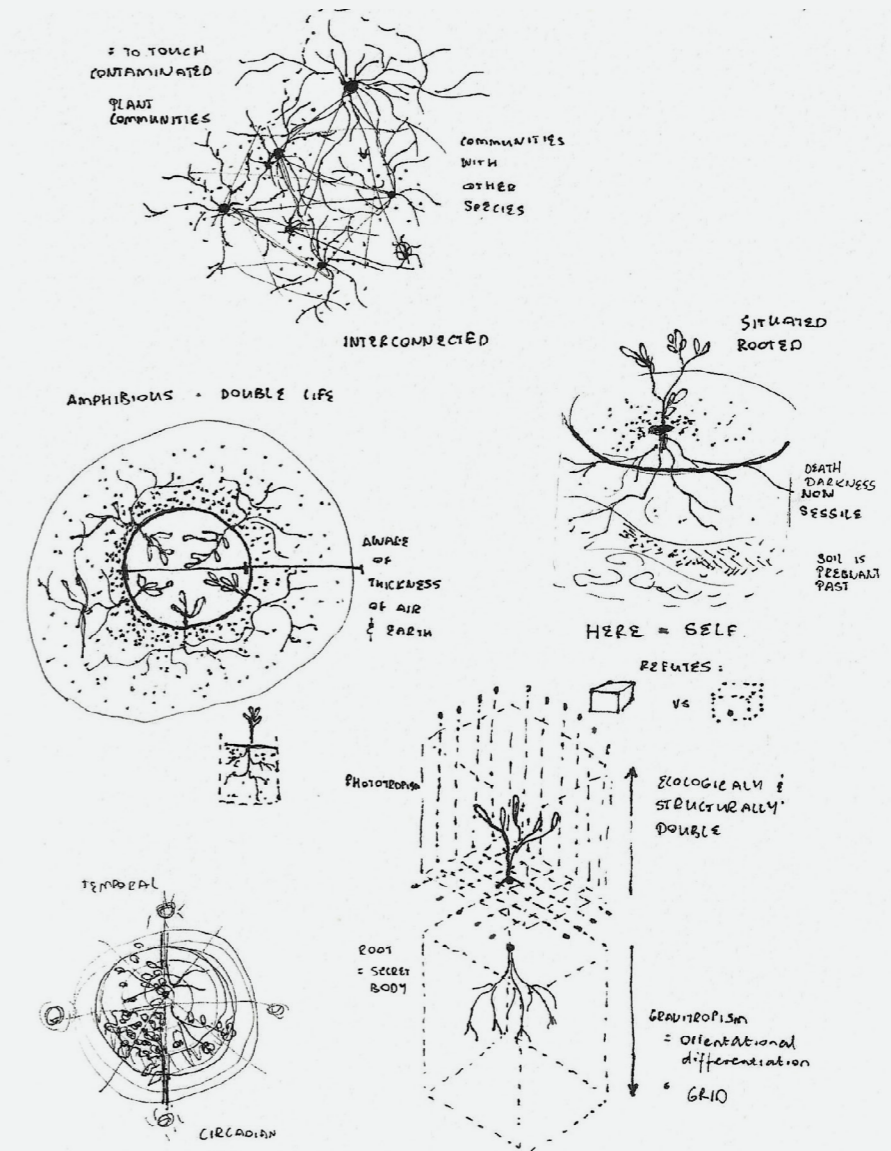
FYNBOS FUTURES

(Manuscript)

Fynbos Futures

Appendix B: Concerning Fynbos

This book is largely concerned with Fynbos, and from its pages a reader may discover much of their character and a little of their history. Here, you will find notes on the three fundamental characteristics of Fynbos lives: amphibious, contaminated and temporal. These being the three principles which provided the foundations from which the flats were rebuilt



Amphibious:

The word amphibious comes from the ancient Greek word: βυφίβιος (amphíbios), derived from βυφί (amphi) meaning double + βίος (bios) meaning life. The root of the word means to have a double life. Thus, the word can apply to Fynbos plants, and all plants in general, as they are inherently amphibious and hybrid.

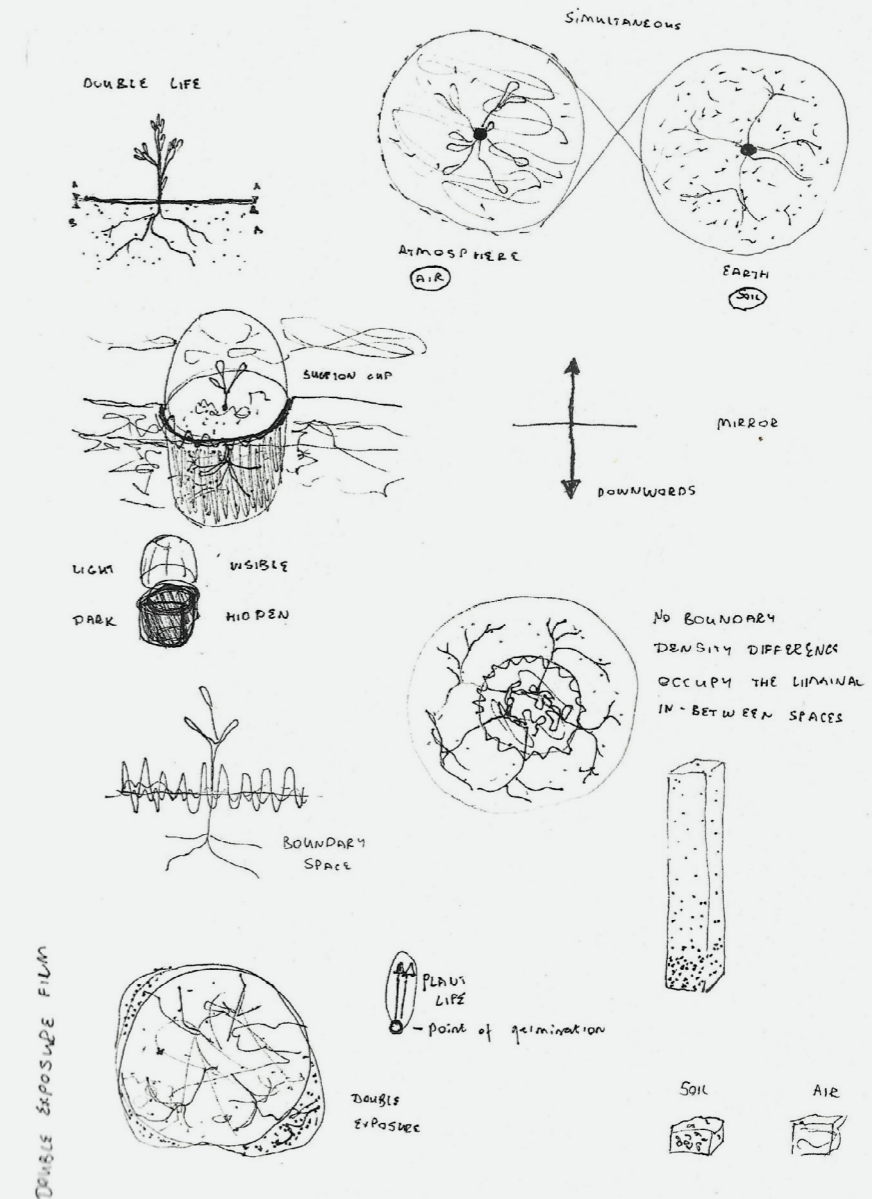
They simultaneously create spaces in two opposing planes, above- and below the ground.

Plants are the clearest proof that beings and the environment cannot be separated or conceived in exclusive terms. In the words of philosopher Emmanuel Coccia⁵⁷, whom this author holds in high regard, because of his dealings with plants: “they connect environments and spaces”.⁵⁸ Through their lack of movement (other than that of their own growth) plants are completely connected to what happens to their environment. They are situated beings. Fynbos, being plants, cannot be separated from the world that accommodates them. They demonstrate that life cannot be split into container and contained, because the container is in the contained and *vice versa*.⁵⁹ From this point of view, they challenge the fundamental aspects of the natural sciences: the priority of the environment over beings, of the world over life and of space over the subject. Fynbos have always shaped their environments in an architectural way, instead of just adapting to it. Through their architecture of which they are both part and content, they break down the topological hierarchy that has so far reigned supreme in discourse about the order of things in the world.

57
A note on the use of real Authors and texts in this Appendix. This is done to substantiate the theory-fiction of the imagined novel Fynbos Futures. The imagined novel was written around the time that this thesis is, 2024. Thus, it is very plausible that the author of the text would have dealt with similar authors and texts than this thesis, in order to create their speculative fiction.

58
Emanuele Coccia, *The Life of Plants : A Metaphysics of Mixture*, trans. Dylan J Montanari (Cambridge, UK; Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2019), 81.

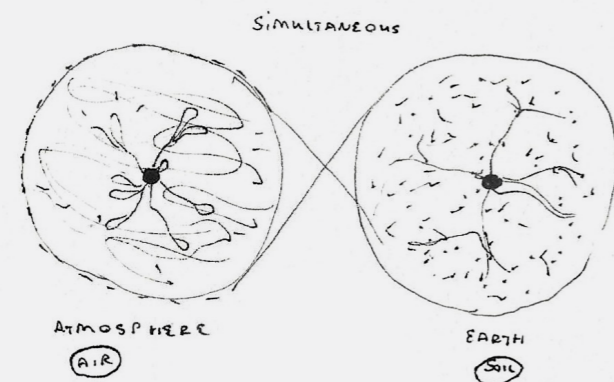
59
Ibid.



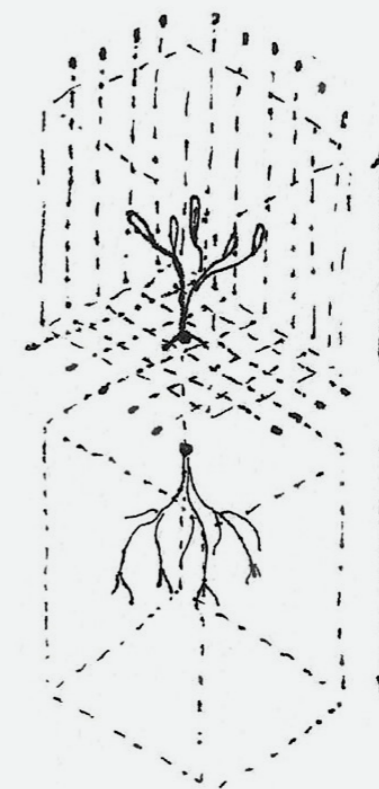
Living Double

Fynbos architectures are created in in two opposing directions. However, in a very real way plants create spaces in always in the same direction: away from the point of germination. After a seed germinates its growth happens upwards and downwards simultaneously. The root of the plant, which is underground, is the plant’s secret second body, mirroring the growth that happens

above ground. Directional gravity sensing in gravitropism allows the plant to discern the difference between up and down. This introduces an orientational differentiation on the space, creating a meaningful grid on it, and designing the space into a place/habitat. After this initial design, the fynbos continues to creatively interact with a greater part of the space around it as it grows. Michael Marder describes this vegetal activity of growth as a “lived meaning making activity”. They grow from all their extremities with new root tips, new shoots and unfurling leaves, in a quest for nutrients and moisture. This is a very simplified illustration of the world-making that plants take part in. The landscape around them is thus constantly changing to keep up with the dynamism of growth. Marder suggests that because of the double life of plants, below and above the ground, plants have a more complex sense of space compared to humans.⁶⁰ This understanding can lead to important questions. What does it mean to be rooted? To be completely connected to the whole environment around you, both earth and atmosphere? And what can we learn about the world through this immersion in the landscape?



60
Michael Marder, "The Place of Plants: Spatiality, Movement, Growth," *Performance Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2015): 185. Pg 90.



Soil & Air

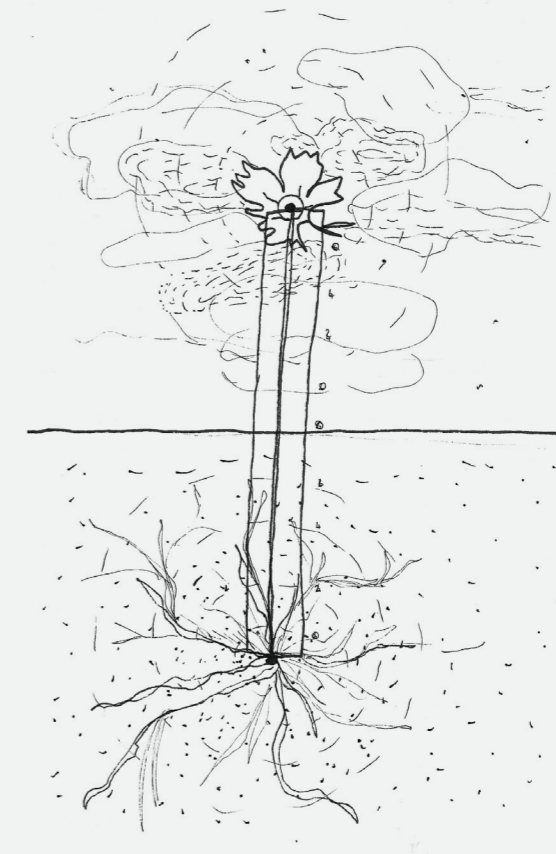
The doubled character of plant architectures is very interesting as it brings into play both the spaces above the ground and below. Fynbos are fully immersed in both realms of their double life. They inhabit the thickness of the air and the soil. They are shaping by creating and taking up space in these volumes.

In the Afro-xeno-feminist understanding of soil, soil becomes multi-dimensional, multi-temporal spatiality: a space with many species, and many timelines, crossing in and out. Fynbos form part of this dimension, because of their roots. Fynbos plants understand the soil, the various relationships found in the soil, that affect for instance soil fertility, and then design with and through these understandings.

For a plant to live prosperously it needs the soil to prosper. Soil, as an amalgam of decomposed organic matter, intertwines the present with past ecologies and histories. Marder writes: “mourning for the dead would be refusing to acknowledge the other, subterranean, nocturnal part of plant life, the life that has no grounds, literal or figurative, for its vitality, save for its close engagement with decay, with death whence it is replenished and reborn”⁶¹. Thus, in fynbos lives, the present and past is always intertwined. Soil carries scars from colonial heritages, they hold the damage of creating enclosures, eradicating the commons, desiccating whole species and indigenous peoples and carrying over enslaved people to become a labour force.

Air is the shared commons of all living beings. Through their visible body fynbos inhabit the atmosphere. Thus, interacting with the precious resource of breath. In her book: *The Many (Political) Lives of Air*, Nerea Calvillo asks: “what if we think of it (air) as an atmospheric infrastructure that sustains our breath? Air as a common infrastructure that sustains life.” Emanuele Coccia argues that without plants there can be no air, they sustain our breath. Thus, in *Fynbos Futures* we can replace Calvillo’s words with: what if we think of fynbos as a common infrastructure that sustains life? They are life-making machines. Their work for and with us cannot be ignored. And this is the belief of the council.

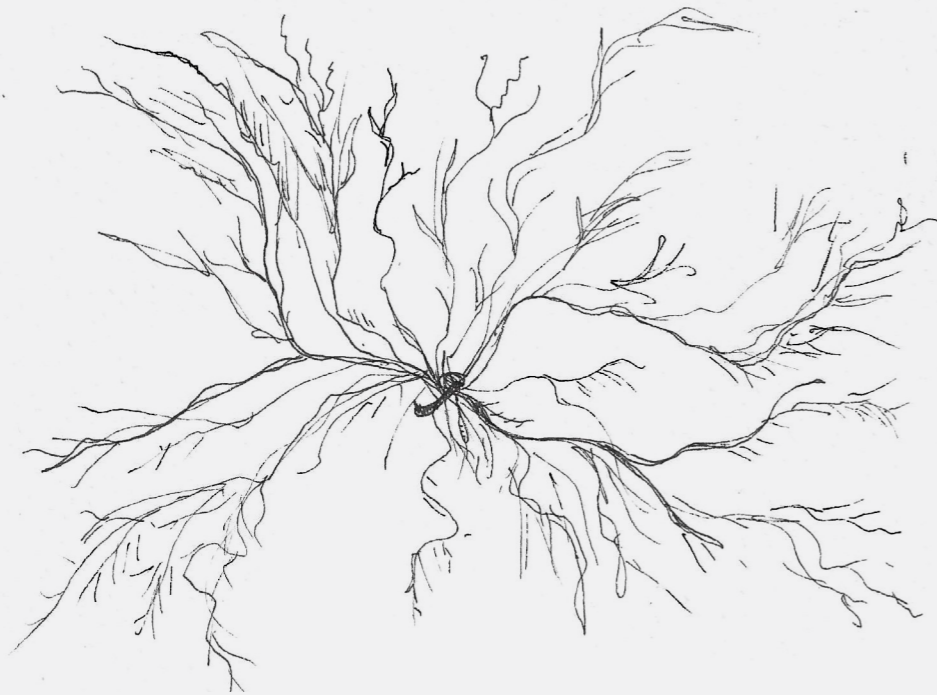
⁶¹ Michael Marder, “A Philosophy of Stories Plants Tell,” *Narrative Culture* 10, no. 2 (August 5, 2023): 194.



Exchange

Fynbos life follows from their exchange with their environments and the beings they inhabit with. Plants respond to nutrient availability by modulating their root architecture. For example, in nutrient-rich areas, plants tend to grow more fine roots to maximize absorption. In contrast, nutrient-poor areas may trigger root elongation to explore new areas of the soil. Plants grow toward light, a phenomenon known as phototropism. This is controlled by plant hormones like auxins, which redistribute to the shaded side of the plant, causing cells to elongate and the plant to bend toward the light. This allows plants to optimize light exposure

for photosynthesis. Hydrotropism is the growth response of plants to water. Roots often grow toward areas where there is more moisture in the soil, allowing them to absorb more water for the plant's needs. This response helps plants survive in environments with variable water availability. Fynbos have adapted their roots specifically to the sandy, nutrient-poor soils of the Cape, and have adapted to flourish from the destruction wreaked by the frequent fires.

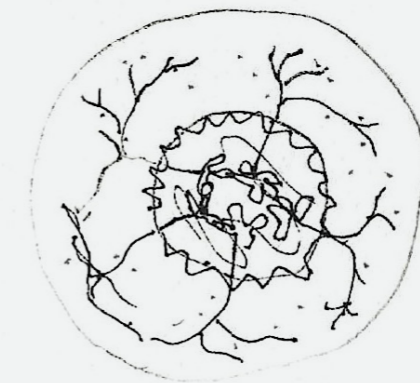


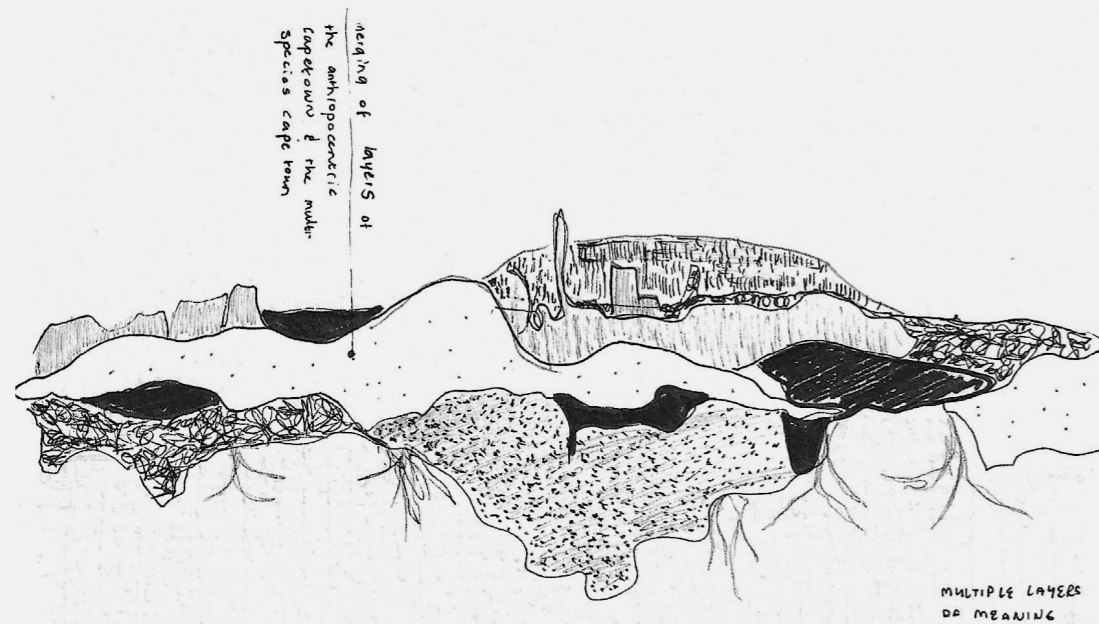
Borderless

Fynbos inhabit both earth and air, dissolving boundaries between realms and occupying liminal spaces. Their architectures intricately negotiate and integrate border typologies, resulting in hybrid, non-strict spatial definitions. Through this borderless existence, Fynbos invite a rethinking of space beyond rigid delineations, and challenge

traditional conceptions of space that rely on fixed, linear boundaries. Their engagement with both land and sky suggests an interstitial spatiality, where distinctions between one domain and another are not absolute but permeable, fluid, and interconnected. In this way, Fynbos invite a rethinking of space that extends beyond rigid delineations of interior and exterior, natural and artificial, or cultivated and wild. Their growth patterns, that respond to fluctuating environmental conditions, reveal the malleability of spatial boundaries, urging us to consider space not as a static container but as a continuous, relational process of becoming.

This spatial fluidity is especially pertinent in urban contexts, where these plants, often viewed as marginal or decorative, disrupt anthropocentric notions of place and ownership. The Fynbos challenges the colonial legacies of land partitioning and the linear separation of nature and culture, offering a model for how spaces can be reimagined as shared, interconnected, and interdependent.

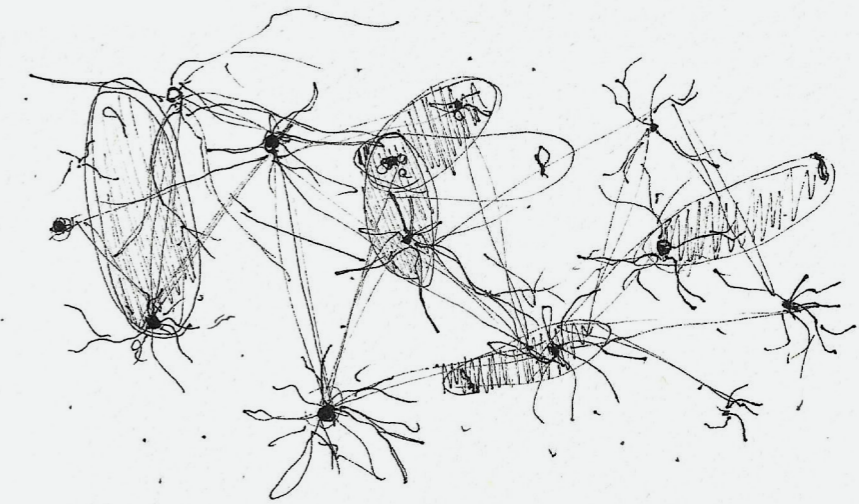




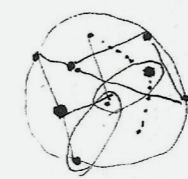
Contaminated

The word contaminate is derived from the Latin *contaminat-* meaning 'made impure,' from the verb *contaminare*, which itself originates from *contamen*, meaning 'contact' or 'pollution.' This is further broken down into *con-* meaning 'together with,' and *tangere*, meaning 'to touch.' The root of the word conveys the practice of contaminating—to touch with, to mix, to make one thing enter into another. This concept of contamination can fittingly be applied to Fynbos plants, as they are inherently agents of contamination in through their relational acts of worlding, constantly touching, interacting, and transforming the spaces they occupy. Contamination here, does not refer to a process of degradation or pollution, but one of mixture, where the intermingling of life forms create a state of contamination. Through their very existence, Fynbos plants speak

to the need for an integrated, interconnected, and contaminated view of the world, a view that resists the dualities of isolation and separation, and instead embraces the complexities and hybridities of the natural world.

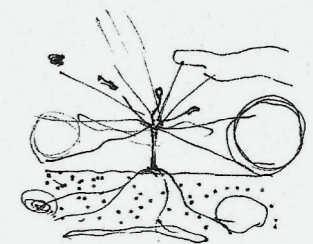
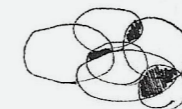


CONNECTIONS



- kin
- Familiar
- o - - - o Zandag
- Biotic - abiotic

SPACES OF CONTAMINATION = MIXING

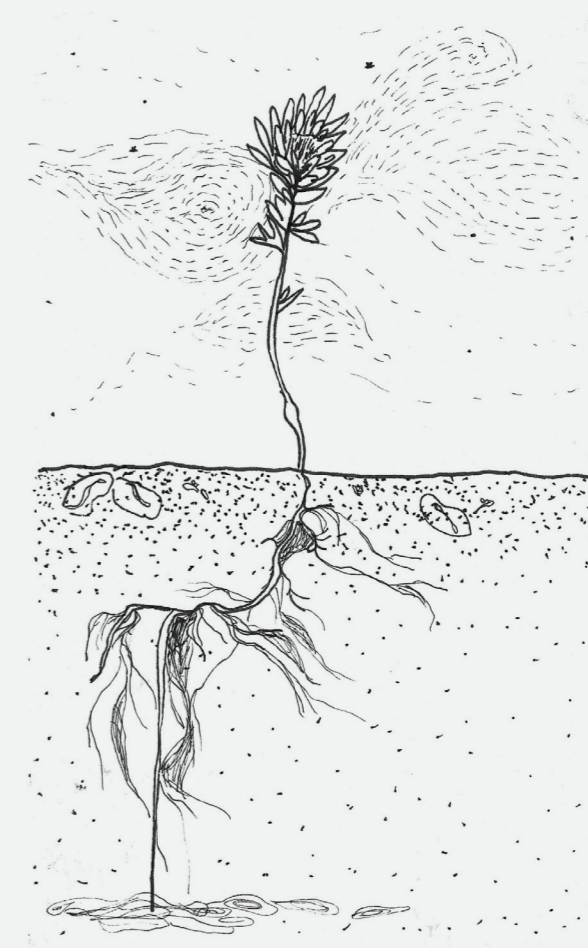
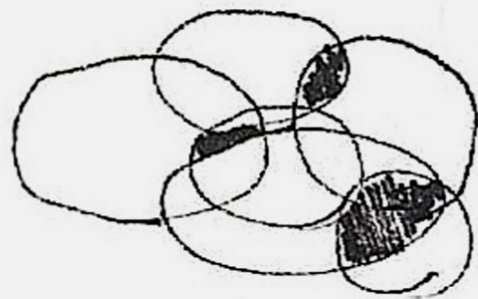


Space-making

Fynbos exemplify the definition of contamination as "together with" or to touch and transform. In ecosystems, they act as agents that permeate and shape the spaces around them, drawing together diverse elements

to form a dense, interdependent web of relations. Through their roots and the symbiotic associations, they cultivate, especially with fungi and microorganisms, they create a vast network, touching and altering the soil, air, and the other beings inhabiting these realms. In this sense, plant matter acts as both physical and cultural agent, binding history, place, and the diverse species it hosts.

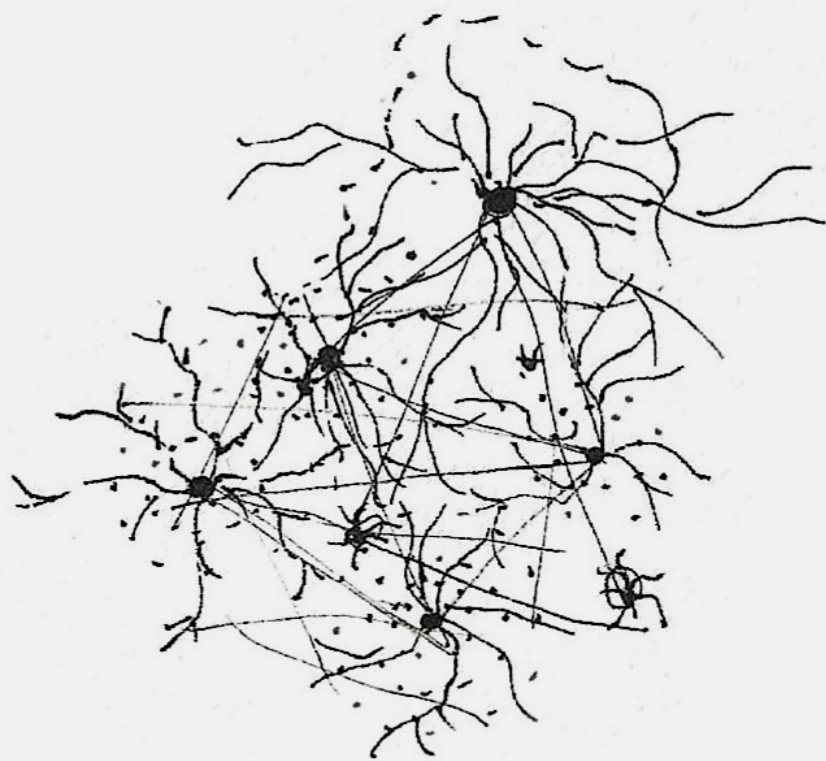
The Fynbos practice of contamination extends to nutrient cycles, air purification, and water regulation, which enable them to influence and stabilise their ecosystem. Their presence contributes to the creation of microclimates and habitats, supporting diverse life forms. They operate as "life-making" machines, whose processes of transformation sustain the ecosystem's balance and complexity, supporting not only life but diverse modes of existence that complicate simple delineations between species or spaces. Their space-making is not confined to single, discrete acts, but rather emerges through continuous processes of mixing, exchanging, and reshaping.



Entangled

Fynbos plants engage in constant interactions with other beings, creating hybrid ecologies that challenge the notion of purity. These interactions include exchanges between Fynbos species, as well as relationships with pollinators, seed dispersers, and microbial life in the soil. Fynbos plants engage in exchanges with other plants, insects, and microbial communities. For instance, many Fynbos species have co-evolved with specific pollinators, creating mutual dependencies. These pollination relationships are a form of contamination, mixing genetic material across species boundaries. In the nutrient-poor soils of the

Cape Flats, Fynbos plants have also developed specialized root systems to maximize nutrient intake. They form symbiotic relationships with mycorrhizal fungi, which enhance their ability to absorb essential minerals. This relationality is central to understanding the Fynbos plants. The plants themselves are shaped by their exchanges with other beings, inhabiting spaces that are influenced by both natural processes and human interventions. These hybrid entanglements reflect the intermingling of histories, species, and cultures, a living archive of contamination that challenges the myth of pristine nature. Coccia writes that plants define their identity thanks to the life of other living beings. The contaminated characteristic illustrates this entanglement. Fynbos teach us that life is dynamic web of relations in which they actively participate.



Embracing the Alien

The binary opposition of native versus alien species has been a persistent framework in conservation and ecological discourse, particularly in South Africa's history of managing the Fynbos biome. However, this distinction becomes problematic when viewed through the lens of contamination and hybrid entanglements. The concept of "nativeness" often assumes a static, pure state of ecological belonging, while labelling certain species as "alien" or "invasive" implies a disruptive force that must be eradicated to restore a perceived natural order.

Fynbos plants themselves challenge this binary, by intermingling without discrimination with whatever beings enter their environment. Many species considered native have co-evolved with "aliens" making it difficult to define a clear boundary of what belongs and what doesn't. The introduction of plants other than Fynbos has created hybrid ecologies that cannot be undone. Rather than viewing these interactions as negative, we can see them as an ongoing narrative of exchange and transformation, where the distinction between native/alien becomes blurred.

Temporal

The word temporal is derived from the Latin *temporalis*, meaning 'of time,' from *tempus*, meaning 'time.' The root of the word emphasizes the

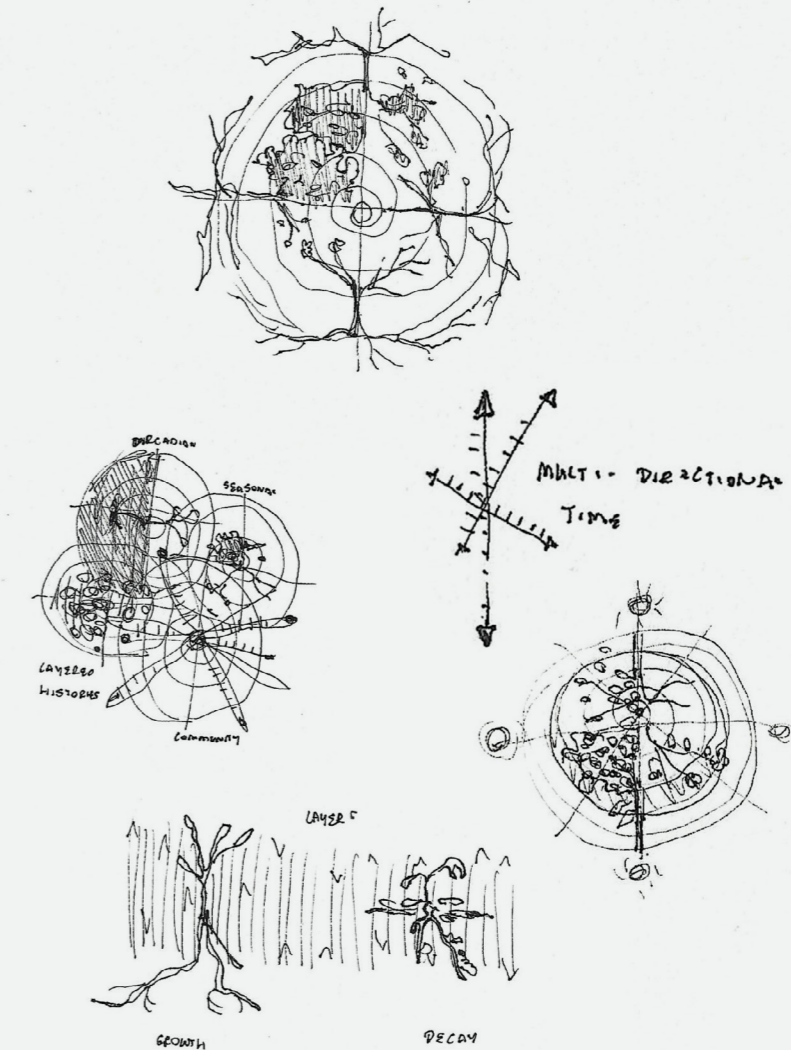
relationship between existence and time, suggesting that all things are situated within the flow of temporal processes. In the context of plants, this term is particularly relevant as they are deeply embedded in the rhythms of time. Fynbos are not only temporal in their life cycles, growing, flowering, and decaying, they also shape and are shaped by the passage of time. Through their seasonal transformations, they mark the cycles of the earth, the changing of the seasons, and the continuity of life. Thus, the word temporal captures the essence of plants' engagement with time, as they exist within and contribute to the ongoing processes of change, growth, and regeneration.

Michael Marder writes that:

"Plants do not experience time as a succession of present moments; rather, their temporality is ecological, embedded in rhythms of growth, decay, and regeneration. They embrace a time that is neither linear nor strictly individual but is dispersed across the connections they make with soil, air, light, and other beings."

Marder emphasizes how plants relate to time through growth, which is non-linear and fundamentally intersubjective: "The temporal existence of plants is structured by processes that defy the human experience of time. Rootedness requires a temporal openness to the cycles of growth, decay, and rebirth, a temporality that absorbs and responds to what surrounds it, continually shaping and being

shaped by other beings." This aligns with his concept of plants as beings that participate in a "living memory" embedded within the landscape, connecting present growth with the past.⁶²



Adaptive Temporalities

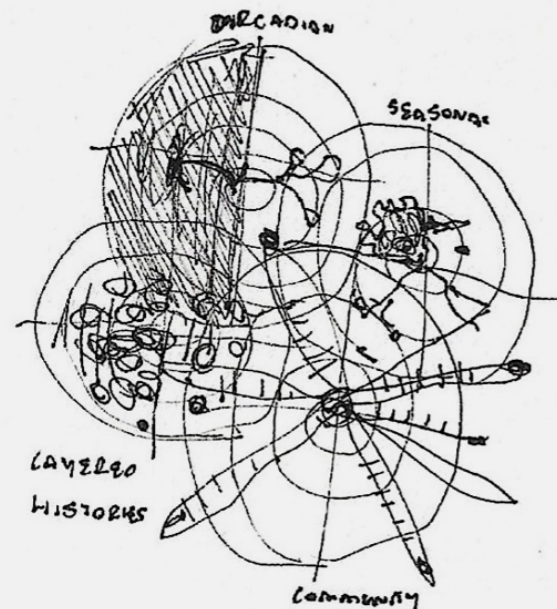
Anna Tsing highlights how plants and other non-human entities engage with time in cyclical, multi-directional, and interdependent ways, challenging a strictly forward-moving temporality. For instance, Tsing's work reveals how plants adapt to and influence the "salvage accumulation" left by human interventions, suggesting a complex temporality in which plants

62
Michael Marder, *Plant-Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

contribute to ecological rebalancing across extended timescales. Unlike human-centered timelines, plant architectures embody a temporal entanglement that intertwines with geological, ecological, and atmospheric rhythms.

Rooted Memory and Cyclical Time

In this way, temporality reflects an ongoing, relational process where growth is not only forward-facing but also rooted in the past. Fynbos roots, for example, draw on decomposed organic matter, entangling the present with the residues of past ecologies. Stefano Mancuso discusses how root systems exhibit “memory” through adaptive responses, embedding the plant in a network of cumulative past encounters that shape its future interactions. This capacity to bridge past, present, and future reflects a non-linear, cyclical temporality where each phase of growth both depends on and redefines the surrounding environment.⁶³



63
Stefano Mancuso and Vanessa Di Stefano, *The Revolutionary Genius of Plants: A New Understanding of Plant Intelligence and Behavior* (New York, Ny: Atria Books, An Imprint Of Simon & Schuster, Inc, 2018).

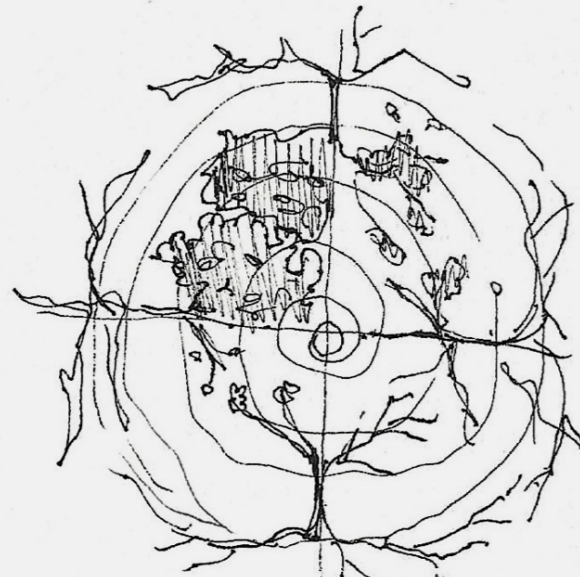
Living Archives

Such plant temporalities blur the distinction between life and decay, regeneration and depletion, embodying a “living archive” of layered histories and ecological processes. This multi-temporality challenges rigid human timescales by situating plant growth within cycles of interspecies interdependence, as well as within the broader flows of natural resources and atmospheric exchanges. Fynbos architectures, therefore, create habitats that transcend linear time, where soil, air, and root interrelations become indicators of multi-species, multi-epochal narratives embedded in the landscape. In doing so, plants redefine space and time as inherently co-constructed, immersive, and participatory, opening new possibilities for understanding temporality in architecture beyond anthropocentric constructs.

Temporal Growth

Through their incremental growth, fynbos also contribute to an ongoing temporal process that unfolds as they establish themselves in space. Leaves and branches unfurl in response to sunlight, while roots expand into untapped areas of soil, continually drawing nutrients and memories of the past into new growth. This form of “lived meaning-making,” as Marder describes, is a form of temporally aware architecture, where each new extension builds upon what came before, integrating changes in light, soil composition,

and climate into a cumulative expression of time.



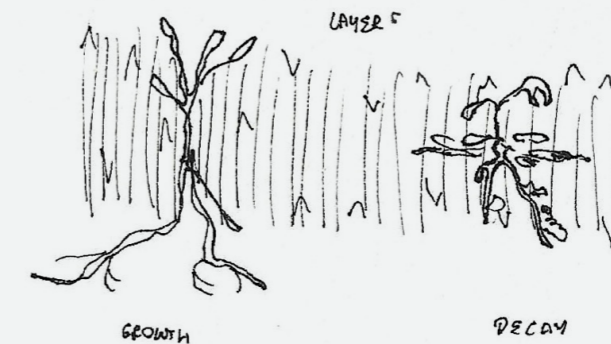
Regeneration and Renewal

Plants' temporality does not adhere to a linear progression but rather follows a cyclical rhythm that supports regeneration and renewal. Their architectures sustain both present life and future ecosystems by contributing to soil health, carbon storage, and atmospheric balance, embodying a temporality that is as much about endurance as it is about transformation. Through this temporal architecture, plants are agents of continuity, knitting together fragmented pasts, adapting in the present, and laying groundwork for future ecologies.

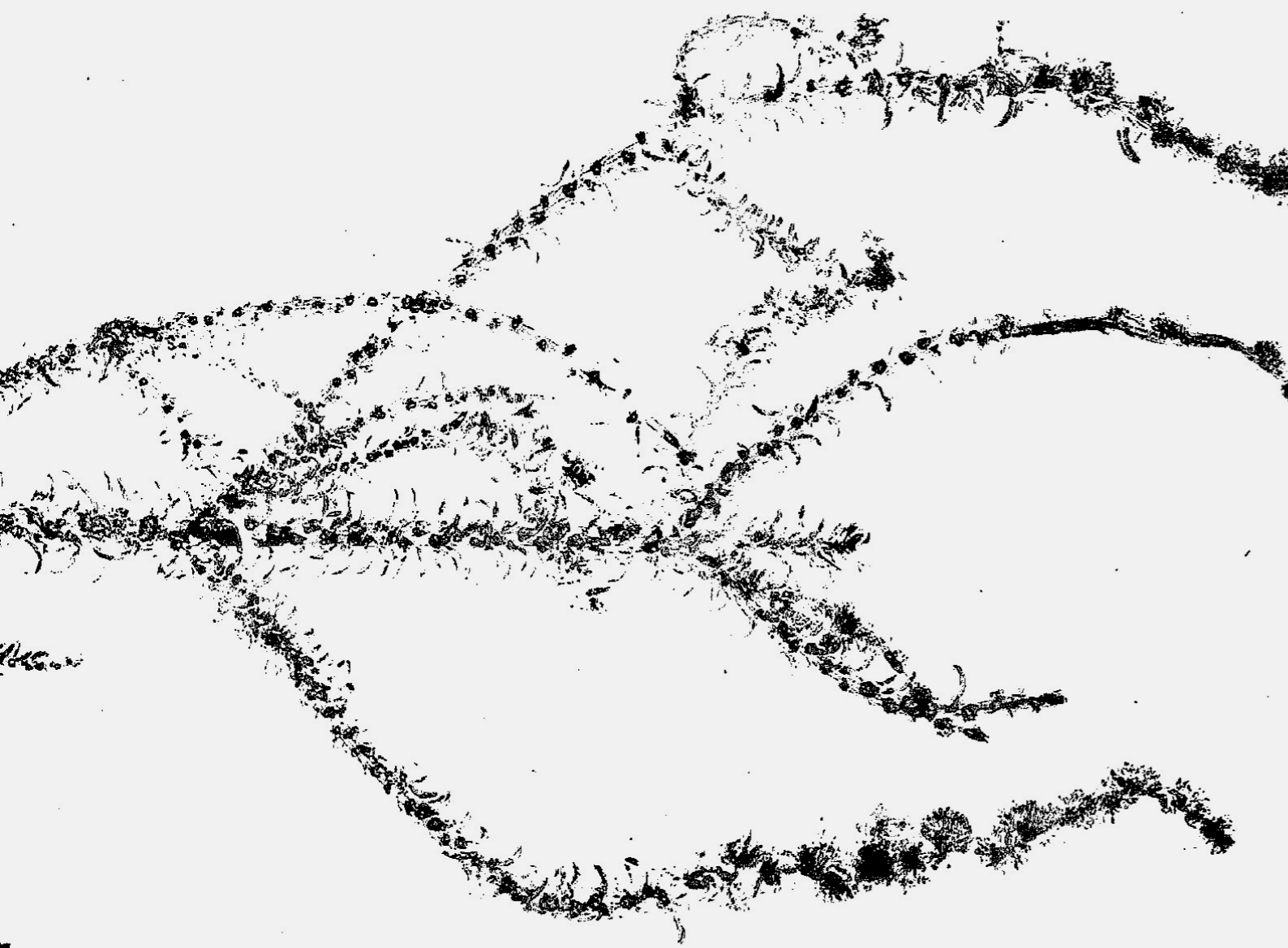
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Fynbos as Collaborators: Understanding Plant Agency in the Cape Flats



These notes hope to have clarified the characteristics of our more-than-human collaborators, the Fynbos plants. In hope that a deeper understanding of the lives of these complex plants, can help deepen the understanding of the reforms and renewals applied to the territory of the Cape Flats, and the new way of life in 2040.



Fynbos Futures - Manuscript

Line drawing tracing of Fynbos
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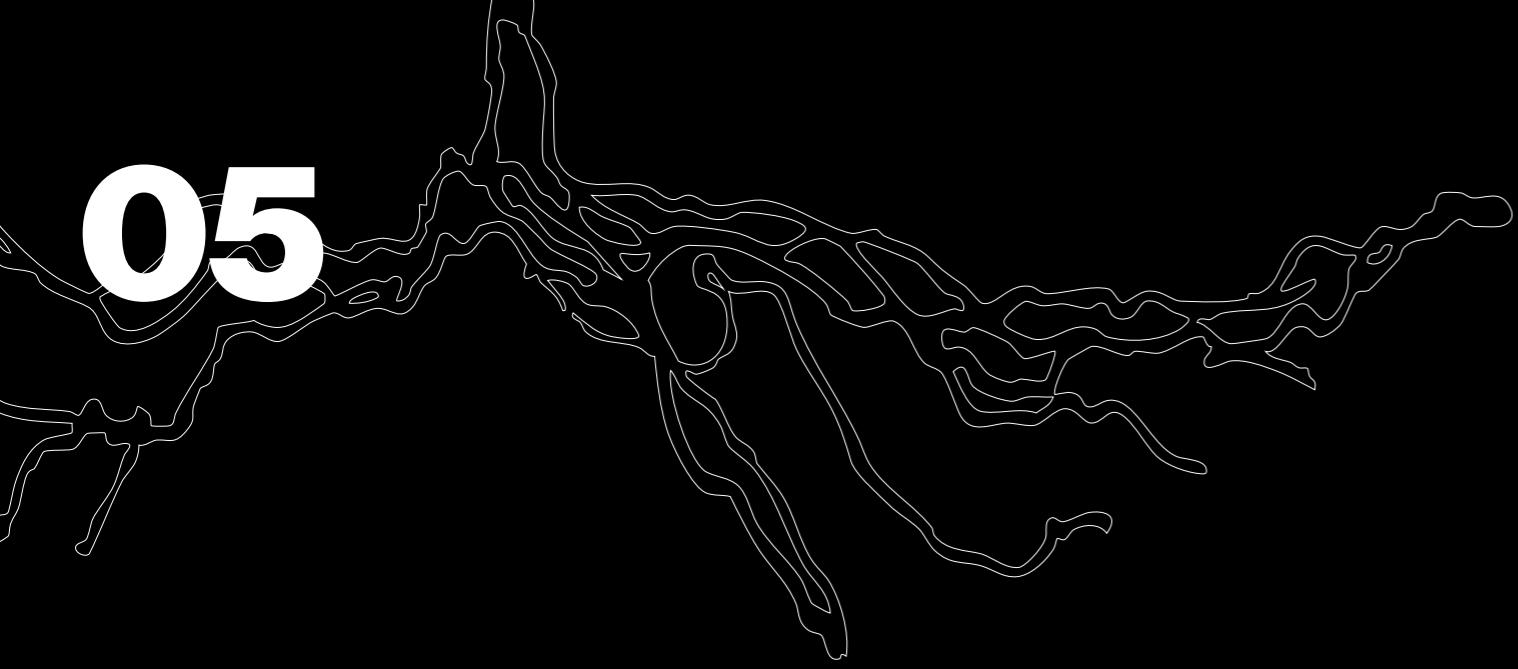


Plants as Protagonists

Fynbos Worlding

For this thesis, it is important to show the ways in which plants are not inert objects, there for human exploitation, but active agents with space making capabilities, ones from which humans could learn from on how to adapt to and thrive in precarity. Following from "Appendix B", the concepts of amphibious, contaminated and temporal, have been provided as an example of how speculating on the lives of more-than-humans and their entanglement with the earth, can lead to imagining new ways of being and organising on a damaged planet. In the fictional narrative that will be presented in the next chapter, these characteristics shape and inform the lives of the characters, as they have opened themselves up to living otherwise. In the final chapter, the speculation on how the three concepts would translate into a speculative special image of the territory will be presented. This chapter hopes to have represented plants as protagonists of world shaping endeavours and Fynbos in the story of the Cape Flats. "Aphibious", "Contaminated" and "Temporal" have now been added to the glossary for the future. In the next chapter, where the speculative narrative of Fynbos Futures, will be presented, remember that the glossary is there to guide your reading, and imagining.

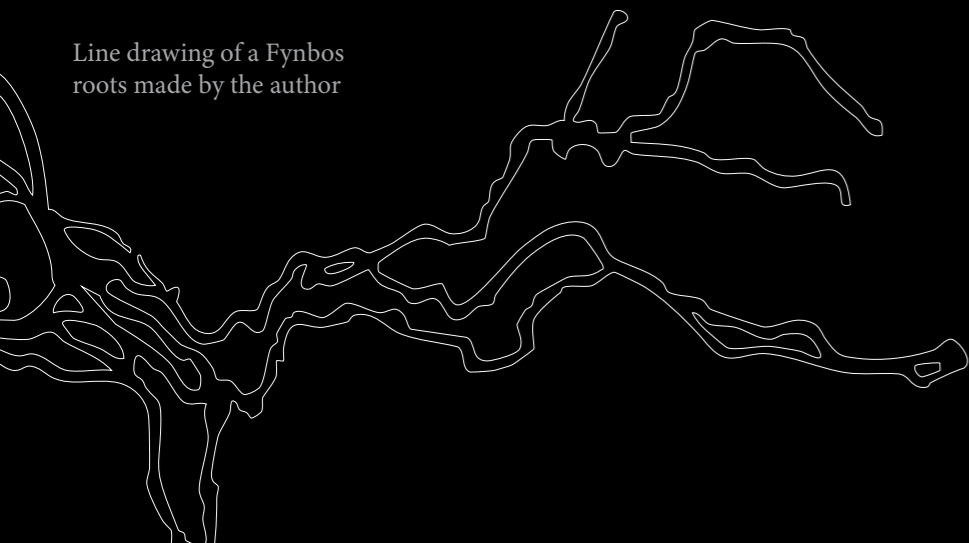
05



The Manuscript

A Fictional Narrative for the Future

Line drawing of a Fynbos
roots made by the author



Fiction-Friction: Speculative Storytelling as a Tool for Reimagining the Cape Flats

As Donna Haraway argues, storytelling is a complex, but essential practice for revealing the intricacies of more-than-human assemblages and their broader ecological entanglements.¹ Stories shape worlds. They frame what we understand as possible. In conservation discourse and extinction studies, narratives do more than describe the world, they actively shape it, making claims about what matters, who belongs, and how we might respond to unfolding crises.² Stories, therefore, are political acts. In telling them, we either reinforce dominant paradigms or create openings for alternative futures to take root. Speculative storytelling offers a means of re-appropriating complex (power) structures and breaking open the borders of our current imagination. It invites us to move beyond passive acceptance of existing norms and instead participate in co-creating new realities

This thesis proposes that by embracing fiction as a tool to reimagine contested territories, architects and designers can resist the passive reproduction of entrenched norms and begin to actively participate in the co-creation of new possibilities. By projecting future scenarios that are imaginative yet situated, speculative design can challenge existing paradigms, grounded in alienation and exploitation. This process, however, is not about crafting utopian visions or idealized endpoints. Rather, *fiction-friction* operates through open-ended narratives, stories that evolve over time, adapting to shifting contexts

¹ Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 10.

² Ben Garlick and Kate Symons, "Geographies of Extinction," *Environmental Humanities* 12, no. 1 (May 1, 2020): 296–320.

and ongoing challenges. It is in this friction, this tension between speculative ideas and material realities, that the potential for real-world transformation lies. The process is not about predicting outcomes, but about breaking open the borders of our current imagination to engage alternative ways of living on a damaged planet.

The Cape Flats, a site layered with histories of violence, displacement, and alienation, offers fertile ground for this narrative intervention. By using the alienation of the site as a tool and embedding more-than-human actors into the speculative framework, this chapter presents a future shaped by collaboration across species and scales. The critically endangered yet resilient Fynbos, become key actors in this speculative reimagining. The fire dependent life cycles of the Fynbos plants, and its capacity to thrive through destruction, mirrors the transformative potential of *fiction-friction* as a design tool, as both processes acknowledge that renewal comes through disruption.

In this chapter, an appendix and chapter from the (imagined) unpublished manuscript of the speculative fiction novel *Fynbos Futures*, as well as short excerpts from the novel's prologue and epilogue, are presented as a re-imagining of the Cape Flats through speculative storytelling. Grounded in the relational ontology of *ubuntu*, the political strategies of xeno-feminism, and the entangled narratives of post-natural theory, the novel offers a vision

of a future that resists exclusion, inequality, and alienation. Although *Fynbos Futures* was never formally published, it gained traction among Capetonians through oral narratives, shared in homes and communities as an alternative to the present condition. The novel's stories became a collective practice of future making, where through people began imagining their own lives along the speculative lines of the manuscript. Thus, the writing of *Fynbos Futures* became a collaborative, open-ended process, evolving through contributions and reinterpretations by those who shared it. Because of its fluid nature, it would be impossible to present the entire manuscript in this thesis. Instead, Appendix A offers a brief synopsis of key events between 2025 and 2040, alongside a selected chapter that follows a family as they navigate a fire in the Flats. These excerpts, paired with notes explaining their significance, meaning, and the story's mutations over time, represent the work as a whole and its impact on the collective imagination of the Cape Flats.

The inclusion of this fictional narrative in the thesis is not an act of escapism but a deliberate methodological choice. By harnessing the alienation of the Cape Flats as a tool, and the speculative lives of fynbos as co-architects of this reimagined territory, *Fynbos Futures* embodies what I propose as *fiction-friction*, a mechanism through which speculative fiction generates enough narrative resistance to disrupt entrenched systems and inspire transformative change. Speculative fiction

and images of the future, particularly through the mechanism of *fiction-friction*, offer powerful tools for architects to challenge dominant paradigms and envision alternative possibilities. Storytelling enables architects to resist passive reproduction of the present and actively engage with emergent futures. As Haraway reminds us,

“it matters what stories we tell,”³

because stories have the power to shift paradigms, unsettle assumptions, and break open borders of imagination.

In the case of the Cape Flats, this narrative intervention imagines the speculative lives of Fynbos as agents of urban change. By using the alienation of the site as a tool and embedding nonhuman actors into the speculative framework, this chapter presents a future shaped by collaboration across species and scales. The story of “We are the Seeds” in the manuscript of *Fynbos Futures*, disrupts the entrenched narratives of conservation that see nature as separate from culture. As Garlick and Symons⁴ remind us, storytelling makes claims about “what matters, where the violence occurs, and how we might respond to it.” In this chapter, the act of storytelling is a design intervention, a way to narrate the entangled lives of Fynbos and human communities within the Cape Flats. Through the imagined novel of *Fynbos Futures*, fiction becomes a catalyst for transformation, challenging entrenched narratives and co-creating futures where the boundaries between nature and culture, human and more-than-human, destruction and renewal are constantly negotiated and reimagined. These stories do not provide idealized solutions but instead offer transformative possibilities shaped by continuous negotiation and adaptation.

³ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC); London: Duke University Press, 2016), 35.

⁴ Ben Garlick and Kate Symons, “Geographies of Extinction,” *Environmental Humanities* 12, no. 1 (May 1, 2020): 301.

FYNBOS FUTURES

(Manuscript)

FYNBOS FUTURES

* MANUSCRIPT VERSION
(YET UNPUBLISHED, BUT ORALLY KNOWN)

Prologue:

The current year is 2040. In a collaborative process spanning eight years, preceded by seven years of political reform and protest, the government of Cape Town and the communities of the Cape Flats worked with the fynbos and other more-than-human actors, with technology as mechanism for multi-species engagement, to re-build the Cape Flats from the scraps left by the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal systems that shaped the urban condition of the territory.

in this future technology was leveraged to create methods of coexistence
AN AFROFEMINIST FUTURE

PERTAINING TO THE COALITION OF THE ANC + AXP

Xenofeminist notion

A THEORY-FICTION, FICTION-HISTORY
Appendix C: SUPPLEMENT TO THE SHORT STORIES, CONTAINED IN

A brief synopsis of the years leading up to 2040:

the years things started to change
2025-2032: Political reform:

By the end of 2025, a cascading sequence of crises destabilised global systems leaving the world teetering on the edge of societal collapse. The inevitable implosion of the capitalist market occurred in August, precipitated by the perfect storm of financial deregulation, resource overextraction, and a coordinated wave of cyberattacks,

in some versions of the story reform started as early as 2020

A FUTURE THAT MANY CAPEONIANS THOUGHT WAS THE ONLY POSSIBLE FUTURE.
MANY PREPARED FOR

AN ALREADY FELT CONDITION

MANY OF WHOM WERE ACTING FROM AFRICA

attributed to a decentralized network of hacktivists, targeting the major world economies. At the same time, the world saw an escalation in the wars in the Middle East, as it spread to neighbouring regions with climate-induced migration straining international relations. Anti-migrant sentiment intensified, especially in the Global North, culminating in a near-universal policy of closed borders, with the slogan "Keep Out the Alien" becoming a rallying cry for right-wing populist movements, cementing xenophobia as a dominant political force in Western democracies. Amidst the economic and political turmoil, the ecological crisis reached unprecedented levels. Rising global temperatures wreaked havoc, with Africa bearing the brunt of the devastation. The continent saw an increase in unbearable heatwaves, desertification, and intensifying natural disasters. Cape Town found itself grappling with a worsening environmental and social emergency.

* versions of the story whispered of WW3

Cape Town was once again faced with drought

Between 2025 and 2030, the continued unchecked urban sprawl, and outdated government strategies for environmental management that were still heavily rooted in the nature/culture dichotomy, had decimated the Cape Flats Fynbos. The remaining fifteen percent of the biome shrank to a mere five percent, despite the expansion of statutorily "conserved" areas. Two more species, the Marsh rose and Bloodroot, joined the Flats Gorse, Pyramid-, Showy- and Whorled Ericas, and Mountain Dahlia on the list of extinctions, mirroring a broader

MAINLY INTO THE FLATS

THE CONSERVATION STRATEGIES WERE STILL HEAVILY ROOTED IN BINARY THINKING

THE CFWF
KEPT UP THEIR
WORK IN
PRINCESS ULEI
& BOTTOM ROAD

biodiversity collapse across the region. Grassroots organizations that were still operating in the Flats, like the Cape Flats Wetland Forum, fought valiantly, but their efforts were overshadowed by systemic inaction and ever-widening socio-economic disparities.



JOINING THE
LIST OF FYNBOS
EXTINCTIONS

It was in this context of global uncertainty and its local manifestations that xeno-feminism began to gain planetary traction, as it offered a radical alternative to the failures of traditional governance, seeing an African branch of the movement take root in Cape Town. This branch advocated for XF ideals while embracing African traditions, struggles and innovations, and relying heavily on the teachings of ubuntu.⁵ Drawing on the XF manifesto of "seizing alienation as an impetus to generate new worlds," the movement catalysed the formation

* SEE
APPENDIX
A, WHICH
EXPLAINS
APROXENO-
FEMINIST
PRINCIPLES
FOR CAPE
TOWN

+ = AXF
Afr
Xena
Feminism

⁵ See Part 02: Framework for the Future

the ANC
is the
party that
took South
Africa into
democracy

of the Afro-Xenofeminist Party (AXP), whose policies centred around reframing alienation through ubuntu, decolonising technoscience, and multi-species care and collaboration. By the 2032 general elections the party had garnered enough influence to form a coalition government with the fractured African National Congress (ANC) that was still clutching at dreams of decolonial liberation. The aim of the new government was not to rule/govern/control but to assist-aid-care and dismantle the axis of gender, race and species oppression in Cape Town.

The ANC-AXP coalition birthed Project Fynbos Futures, a radical program to reclaim the Cape flats from the systemic and ecological oppression left as scars on the territory. Central to its vision was the integration of human and more-than-human actors, who through a leveraging of technology could enable multi-species flourishing. The plants of the Cape Flats Fynbos were elected as custodians of the project, because of their proven ability to thrive in precarity and their complex understanding of the territory as amphibious, contaminated and temporal.⁶

AMPHIBIOUS
CONTAMINATED
TEMPORAL,
The three fynbos characteristics become a way of life on the flats

Project Fynbos Futures saw the territory given back to the flats Fynbos, to re-organise as they deemed fit, considering XF principles of equality, emancipation and anti-naturalism. A council was formed to architect a city that deals covertly with the concepts of othering, alienation and invisibility. In

the council was the first step in multi-species collaboration

⁶ See Part 04: Appendix B: Of Fynbos Lives

ALIEN IN THIS CONTEXT REFERS TO SOMETHING OUTSIDE OF WHAT CAN BE IMAGINED, WHICH THERE-FOR NEEDS TO BE IMAGINED

Xenofeminist phrase, scraps does not refer to the Flats itself, as it is a rich & dynamic area, built rather the violences left by capitalist, patriarchal & colonial ideologies

xeno-feminist tradition, they did not seek to overcome alienation, but to create a space that is in itself alien (or newly imagined) because it was believed that through alienation comes emancipation.⁷ The council contained the last remaining plants of the Strawberry Spiderhead, The Flats Conebush, the Fuzzy Kanniedood, the Pearl Heath and the Flats Kalossie, along with their human collaborators, consisting of urban planners, architects, engineers, biologists and artists. The council, in a multi-species collaboration and enmeshed in technology, re-built the Cape Flats from the scraps⁸. Within the Fynbos Futures project the technologies for coexistence that were created included the amphibix, an open-source platform for life and the ChronoCommons (c-c).

the fynbos futures stories became a way for members of the community to imagine alternative futures through collective storytelling

means can die in Afrikaners

the three technologies with which multi-species collaborations were imagined, both in the written & oral narratives

7 See Part 02: Appendix A: Afro-XenoFeminist Manifesto
8 See Part 02: A Framework for the Future

2032-2040: Breaking Ground

reimagining both through the FYNBOS FUTURES narratives & the narratives imagined by members of the community

In the years following the start of the Cape Flats, once a site of ecological collapse and alienation, became the testing ground for a radical reimagining of coexistence. Strategies for the territory were workshopped by the council and community, implemented and continuously re-worked and allowed to mutate into interventions that would allow the site to flourish into a multi-species egalitarian space.

When the Fynbos council came into being in 2032, it was understood that the first step in creating a future for the Cape Flats was a deep reconnection of the Cape Flats communities to the territory. The council wanted to create fertile ground, from which to grow new ways of being in the Flats. At the inaugural meeting in that same year, the council presented to the community, that there is no distinction between below and above ground in Fynbos worlds, they live in a completely emersed amphibious borderless space without, living simultaneously in opposing directions. They are aware of the properties of the soil and air in which they grow. They know what the soil contains and the mixture of matter from which it is made, dealing continuously with the cycles of death and memory embedded in the soil. They understand that the air is not an empty space, but one where many biotic and abiotic elements mix to produce life. They know these elements and understand the complex chemistry needed to

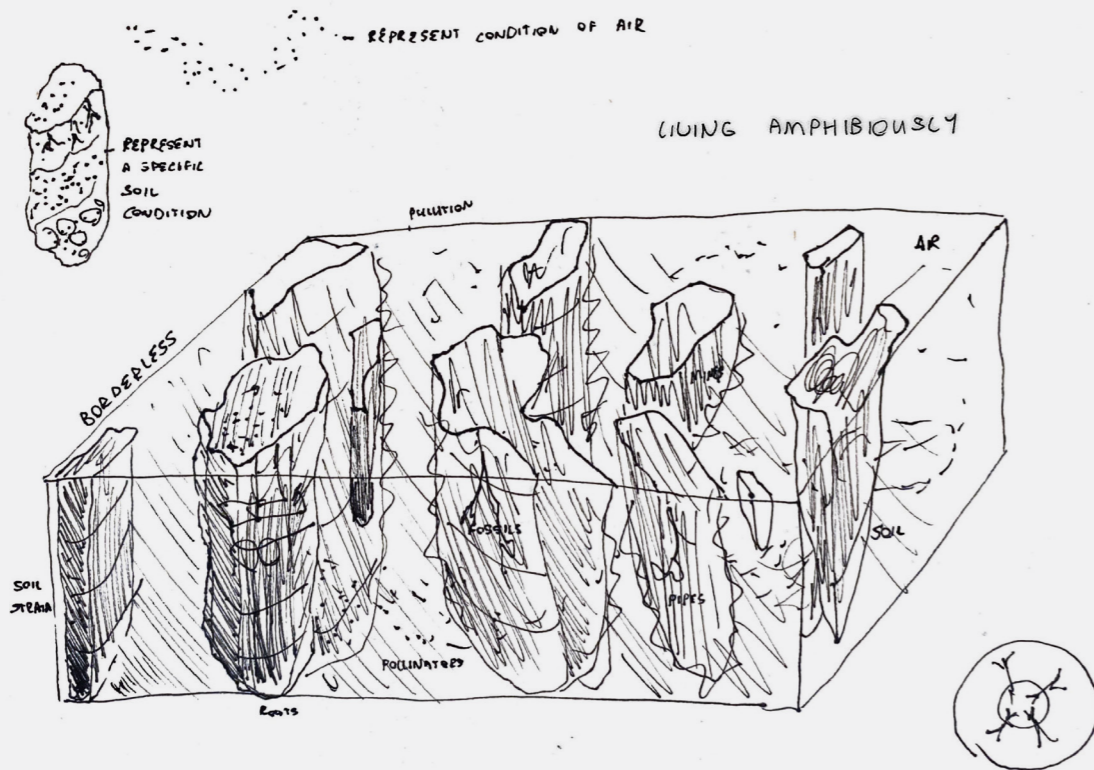
THE CHARACTERISTIC OF FYNBOS WORLDING

there are many different accounts of how the council presented in a more-than-human manner, each more imaginative than the next

SOIL & AIR ARE UNDERSTOOD AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LANDSCAPE



sustain life. This understanding of the world, as having depth and thickness and complexity, needed to be taught to their human kin, to foster a new, enriched relationship between humans and the earth they inhabit and to lay a foundation of awareness that moved away from extractive, exploitative and discriminative practice.



In the first phase of the project, much effort was put into the teaching of the Fynbos way of life to the humans of the city. What arose was the creation of a technology, co-created by artists, engineers, scientists, architects and plants, to assist in "seeing double" called amphibi-x. The technology, in its first stage of development, could be freely accessed and used by any device with a camera, through the scanning of a bar code which many members of the community tattooed on themselves to share the technology with each other.

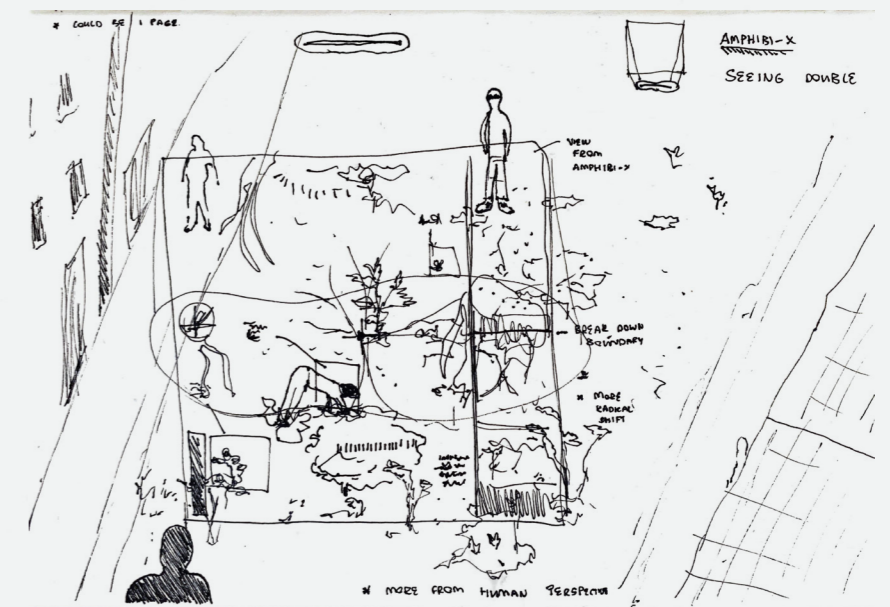
• People learned through the imagining of amphibi-x how to be aware of the soil and the air as an extension of their plane of existence

amphibi-x

was designed to reveal what the territory would look like if humans too could see the world as the Fynbos does, amphibiously and in multiple planes at once. Eventually as the technology developed, it was fitted into a seedpod like eyewear device, which by 2040 many members of the community chose to wear permanently. The technology led to a shift in perspective of the people of the Cape Flats, creating a deep relationship with the territory, one which they had historically struggled to establish because of the layer of colonial patina through which they struggled to break.

This differs in many eras accounts, in some it was a piece of eyewear, others headgear, and in others a built-in dup

AMPHIBI-X ALLOWED THE VIEWER TO SEE THE PATINA, BUT ALSO OTHER LAYERS OF COMPLEXITY



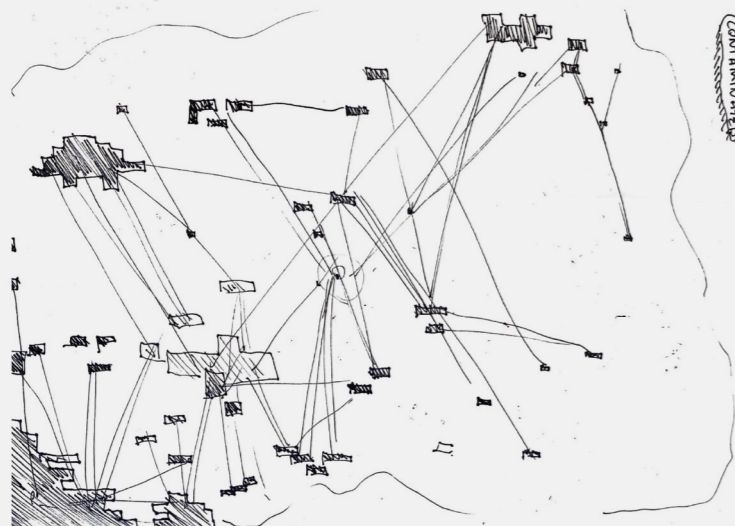
Another key program was created to supplement amphibi-x. The aim of which was the acknowledgement and showcasing of the layers of this colonial patina, which had settled on the territory. This was done through the collecting and representing of memories. The Fynbos council recognised that it was important for the future of the flats that its past be recognised,

memories became an integral part of life on the flats

as they acknowledged that the soil was always pregnant with the past. Thus, an open-source platform, named x-f-f, was created where memories could be shared, and collectively celebrated-mourned. The platform contained a highly developed digital model of the territory as well as geolocators, allowing users to navigate the territory virtually. Spaces of historical social and ecological violence and oppression could be flagged on the model by members of the community, and so collective stories were shared. The stories that were included contained memories of forced removals, plant extinctions, police brutality, more-than-human murders, racial division, and protests, to mention some.

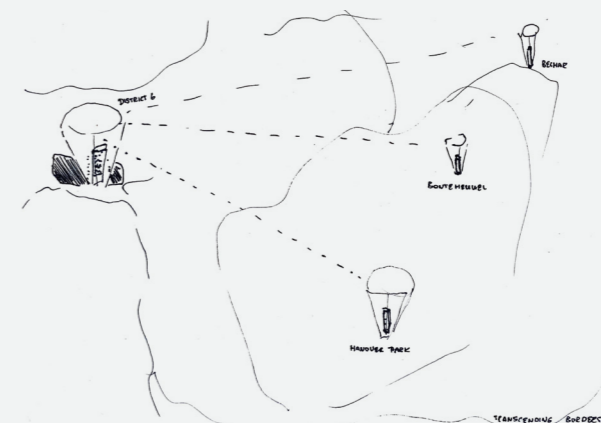
By 2035, the stories that had been uploaded onto the platform were processed and added as another layer of meaning in the *amphibi-x* technology. The Community was encouraged to not only acknowledge these "memory spaces" for what had happened there but to also look to their future.

Whilst the Fynbos futures stories were spread orally, people also added their own stories of struggle, effectively creating this shared memory repository



Through the process of remembering, the importance of District six in the narrative of the Cape flats emerged distinctly. Thus, in 2032 the "empty" space of District six, was added as part of the Cape Flats territory. Even though district six lies twelve kilometres away from the edge of the flats, and is separated from the territory by the Mountain, it is still inextricably tied to the territory in deeper ways than the material. The Fynbos council felt it pertinent to create a site of justice, reconciliation and multi-species flourishing within the historic city centre. By adding District Six to the x-f-f platform and eventually the *amphibi-x* technology it emerged as a living archive. Furthermore, in 2036, to commemorate the area as a space of justice and reconciliation, a small memorial Cape Flats Fynbos Garden was created in a terrarium filled with soil from the Flats. District six was connected to three important sites in the Cape Flats: Hanover Park, Bonteheuwel and Belhar through the playing of real time holograms of the Fynbos interventions that would be created in these areas.

Many alternative ways of creating this connection of the Flats to District 6 were imagined in the oral narratives



During the initial phase of the project, where the seeds for a reclaimed Cape Flats territory were planted with the technologies of *amphibi-x* and *x-f-f*, a move back onto the territory by the Flats Fynbos had slowly begun. After 2035 the reclamation of abandoned urban space on the Cape Flats became the

AS SITES
FOR MULTI-
SPECIES FLOURISHING

main priority on the project agenda. Before the city was built on the only soil that could host the Flats Fynbos, the plants grew freely without following an organised, planned pattern like the one they were forced into by the pre-project¹⁰ government's biodiversity network scheme. Abandoned plots, buildings, factories, cemeteries and mines were reclaimed as spaces for multi-species engagement. In these spaces members of the Fynbos re-rooted. Fynbos corridors were created, and the plants were allowed to intricately weave themselves into the urban fabric of the city, bringing the physical breakdown of any separation between nature and

culture. — THERE IS NO SEPARATION
IN THIS FUTURE

Understanding contamination as an essential part of life, the Fynbos council advocated for multi-species entanglement and collaboration. Purity was shunned and a hybrid, messy, mixture in the urban condition was preferred. The fynbos council recognised the rhythms and cycles of the city, long ignored by the organizing and de-complexifying systems of the city. They recognised fire as an integral part of the city, because it was an integral part of the Fynbos biome. Using a mix of plant and



In the understanding
flaws of fire cycles
become an
important
part of
living in
previously

¹⁰ Referring to the years before the AXP-ANC coalition and the start of Project Fynbos Futures.

human knowledge new fire strategies were implemented within the city, ones that would benefit the Fynbos without causing loss of other livelihoods or lives. The first step was de-mystifying the role of fire in the city and breaking away from its disaster narrative. Fynbos had always been living in the ruins, in fact they flourished in the ruins. Now it was their turn to teach this to their human neighbours. Following the introduction of the new fire strategy, fynbos plants in the city doubled.



In an unintended mutation, the open-source platform x-f-f became involved in the stages of Fynbos reclamation. The platform initially created as a strategy to deal with the history of systemic and ecological violence carved into the territory, became a flourishing site of shared knowledge and multi-species collaboration. Along with memories, new sites where Fynbos had rooted began to be uploaded onto the platform in real time. Every spiderhead that grew through the cracks, every protea popping its head through an abandoned window, and every reed flourishing in the returning wetlands, was flagged. By allowing the Cape Flats community to see the Fynbos growing among them, the pre-conceived ideas of Fynbos as far away in the Mountains and gardens of the elite was overcome, and the barriers between their own lives and those of their Fynbos neighbours were broken down.

BECAUSE OF THE STORIES OF THE X-F-F PLATFORM A HACTIVIST FROM THE FLATS CREATED A SIMILAR OPEN-SOURCE PLATFORM FOR THE COMMUNITY

FYNBOS BECAME A SYMBOL OF NEGOTIATION & EQUITY

This was not all. In a delightful turn of events, many began sharing knowledge of the specific uses and traits of these plants as they had been passed down to them from their ancestors. The platform turned into a resource to show how fynbos, other more-than humans, and humans could co-exist in a contaminated manner, mixing their fates together. Eventually, the open-source platform contained information on how the fynbos that grows in each reclaimed space could be used in a collaborative way. The Fynbos plants have many medicinal properties for multi-species flourishing, which the Westernisation of the territory had rendered mostly forgotten up until

this point.

From 2035 great attention was paid in adding these properties to the platform, taking about five years of collaborative processes between the plants, their pollinators and predators, and human healers and scientists. By 2040 the healing properties of Fynbos had been successfully spread through the platform, which by now had become rich in multi-species collaborations.



RECOGNISING THE MEDICINAL & CULINARY POTENTIAL OF FYNBOS BECAME AN IMPORTANT WAY IN WHICH TO INTERACT WITH THE WORLD WITH THE PLANT

Fynbos as medicine was now preferred to the old Western medicine practices. Parts of the plants were not only used to create medicines, but the spaces where the plants grew were offered as alternative healthcare infrastructures, under the belief that being in a space of green and growing could also add to the healthcare journey. The medicinal properties were not the only fynbos traits added to the platform. The potential of Fynbos as food source had also been overlooked by the government until the formation of Project Fynbos Futures. In a city

where poverty and food scarcity were everyday problems among many who lived on the Flats, the re-recognition of these properties was essential. Some of the reclaimed spaces were added onto the platform as wild farms. Each of these spaces was created in collaboration with a community who would act as stewards to ensure that the collaborations with the plants were conducted in an anti-exploitative/anti-extractive manner.

FIELD
WAS
ONE
OF
THESE
STEWARDS
IN THE
STORIES

The Fynbos Council sought to redefine urbanism itself, looking to temporality as an intrinsic aspect of the city. Here, the multi-temporality of plants challenged the anthropocentric, linear approach to time and space that had defined urban planning for centuries. Instead of viewing the city as a static construct, the Cape Flats emerged as a dynamic, mutating territory where plants, humans and other more-than-human entities co-created a shared territory. The Council advocated for the celebration of decay as much as growth, emphasizing that the breakdown of matter was as vital to life as its proliferation.

Cemeteries, abandoned buildings, and forgotten industrial sites were no longer seen as dead spaces but as fertile grounds for regeneration, where layers of history and biodiversity intertwined to create new possibilities. As a final technology developed for the territory towards the end of 2038, the chronocommons, was introduced. The *commons* allowed users to engage with the layered temporalities of the Cape Flats territory and its multi-species timelines, cycles and

TECHNOLOGY TO
RECOGNISE
TEMPORALITY

seasonalities. Fire and germination cycles became mixed into human timelines. Users could create personal narratives of connection with the land by marking their own paths on the commons, leaving behind trails of life. Beyond individual engagement, the *commons* fostered a collective experience through its shared functionality, allowing community members to contribute their paths to an evolving temporal map. This map showcased the Flats as a living tapestry of interconnected histories, and multiple timelines, that were no longer linear, but **multi-directional**.



The implementation of these infrastructures and strategies for renewal led to where we are today, at the start of the year 2040. The Cape Flats was in no way a utopia, but a messy, iterative becoming, a space where ruins and hopes intertwined like the roots of the fynbos growing in it.

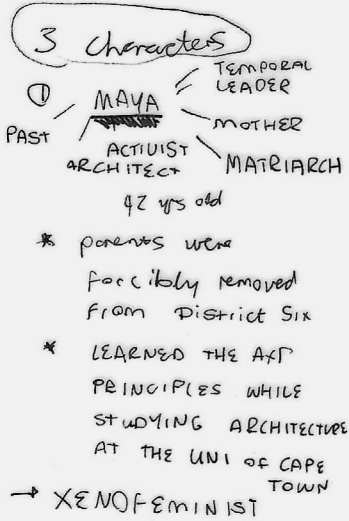
Story 6: We are the Seeds

ONE OF THE STORIES CONTAINED IN THE MANUSCRIPT FOR THE FICTIONAL NOVEL

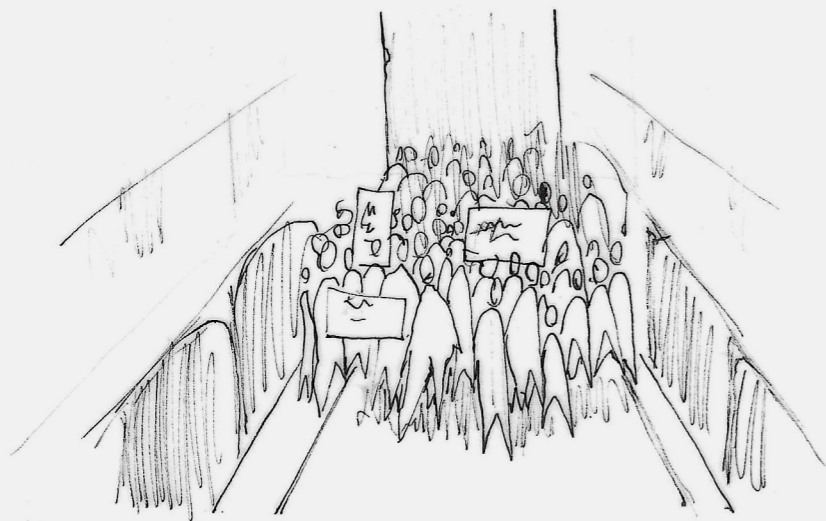
FYNBOS FUTURES

ALL 3 CHARACTERS ARE FEMALE

You could feel the anticipation and tension buzzing like static electricity in the air. It was hot, really hot between all those sweating bodies. This was one of the biggest gatherings yet, and Maya was glad she had decided to come, despite the warnings from her family. This was bigger than her, bigger than the spiderheads they were fighting to protect. This was for the Flats. Then suddenly, as if by some unanimous decision, the bodies started moving, Maya in tow. The March had started, and so did the rest of her life...



MAYA IS THE FIRST CHARACTER INTRODUCED, HER NAME CHANGES IN SOME ACCOUNTS OF THE STORY, BUT HER ROLE AS MATRIARCH, LEADER, ACTIVIST REMAINS THE SAME

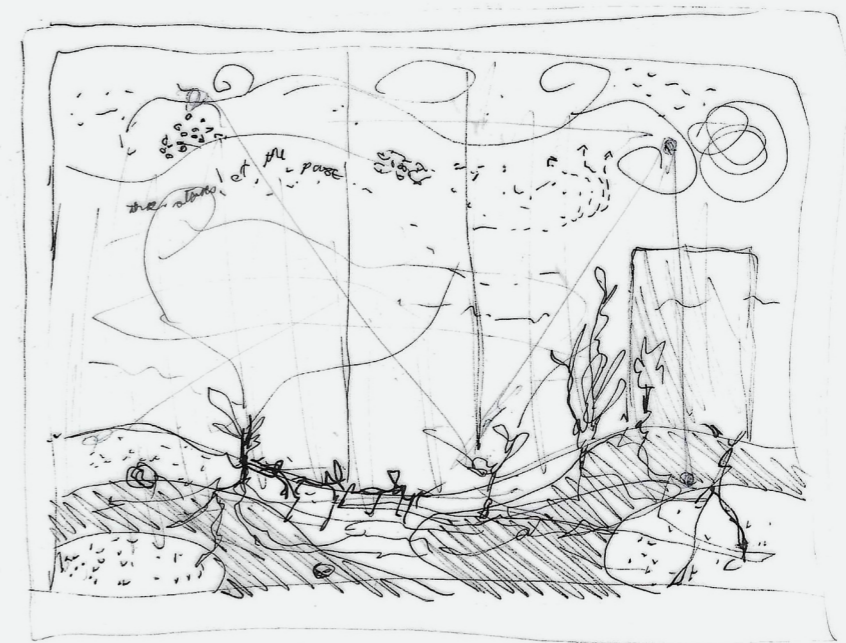
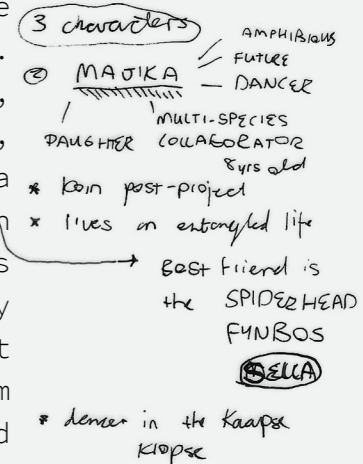


Majika woke up, and before opening her eyes, reached for her amphibi-x device, lying on her bedside table where she had left it the previous night. The device fit her slender face perfectly, resting comfortably against her temples. As the lenses adjusted to the light in her room, the soft hum of the device brought

HOPEFUL FUTURES OF THE FLATS

the name for the reclaimed abandoned urban spaces where multi-species existence was cultivated

the world into focus, the layered world that Majika had always known. Being only eight years old, she had been born post-project and couldn't imagine a life without the technology for living amphibiously. She would lose too many friends, one being her best friend, Sella, whom she considered more of a sister, who was waiting for her in the contaminarium about two blocks away from her own home in Grassy Park. She threw off her blanket and jumped out of bed. Her room was alive with the soft greens and pinks of the projected fynbos life that her amphibi-x device enhanced. These virtual overlays helped her see the true layers of the world, the air, the soil, and even the microbial life that most people once overlooked. It was a messy, beautiful entanglement. She pulled on her favourite overalls, slipped her feet into her sandals, grabbed her small satchel, already packed with her umbrella, and ran to the front door.



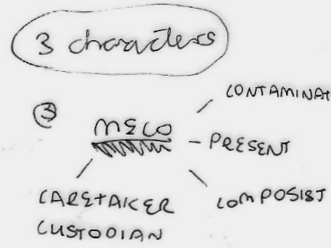
"Mama! Mamaaaa..!" Maya snapped back into the present. Her daughter, Majika was grinning at her knowingly. "Mama, I am going to my dance class. Bye, mama!" Majika called as she ran out the front door. Maya sat in her kitchen in her small house on Bottom road, watching Majika go. She knew her daughter would undoubtedly stop at the contaminarium to visit with her friend, Sella, before going to her community klopse class, and was the happier for it.

Maya watched the sun rise higher over the Flats. The light filtered through the spiky leaves of the silver restio outside her window, casting shadows across her kitchen table. She traced her finger along the tattoo on her wrist, the old way of sharing the amphibi-x technology. The memory of that first march remained sharp. She could still hear the voices chanting, feel the heat of the sun on her back, and the dust rising as they walked through the streets of District six from which her parents had been forcibly removed. Time, she thought, was never linear here. The past, present, and future folded into each other, like the overlapping layers of soil beneath her feet. Something was causing her to be even more contemplative than usual, she thought with a sense of foreboding. Then, closing her eyes, she went back to her memories.

Melo moved quietly through the contaminarium of which she was one of the community custodians, her bare feet brushing against the soft,

ONE OF THE ORIGINAL HOUSES OF THE BOTTOM ROAD SANCTUARY

- SINCE 2025 THE SANCTUARY HAD EXTENDED FROM THE ORIGINAL 10 HOUSES, TO ENCOMPASSING A FEW BLOCKS OF HOUSES



- * works as a steward at the contaminarium
- * has a deep understanding of the entanglement of life

sandy soil. She loved mornings here, before the full heat of the day set in. The air smelled of earth and compost, mingling with the scent of buchu and erica flowers. It was a smell of resilience, of a landscape that had endured ecological and political violence, blooming anew.

She gazed out at the landscape, thinking of its history. This space had once been a wasteland, desertified and filled with debris. It had taken years of collective effort to restore it, to create a place of learning and healing. It was a special place. An integral part of the community and one of the many spaces that formed part of the infrastructure of care that had been set up in the Flats as part of the project. It was messy, alive, always transforming. Melo welcomed this messiness. She taught the children who visited that purity was a myth, that life grew best through entanglement. "Fynbos teaches us that nothing is separate," she told them. "Everything is connected." Her thoughts drifted to Sella, the spiderhead, one of the rarest plants in the sanctuary. Before the project there had only been a single plant left growing in the Flats. Sella's presence reminded Melo of the fragility of life and the responsibility of care. Some people saw plants as passive, but Melo knew better. Sella was a teacher, a living archive of resilience, adaptation, and coexistence, a good friend of her young niece.

It is important about the stories included more than human actors, in some stories Sella become a protea or buchu plant, but they remain a representation of entangled life and coexistence

Mayika

That morning, it was particularly busy and bustling with activity. Families wandered among the fynbos, using their *amphibi-x* devices to access the open-source data of *x-f-f* to interact with the plants, learning their histories, properties and stories. They could access layers of knowledge embedded in recipes, remedies, poems and even political manifestos from activists, such as her older sister Maya, who had fought for the reclamation of the land for the communities, human and more-than, of the Flats.

Melo noticed a young boy crouching next to a Rooikrans bush. "Is it fynbos?" the boy asked. Melo knelt beside him, smiling kindly. "No, not fynbos. It is an alien. This plant came from another place and was brought here long ago." She touched the leaves gently. "In the past, these plants were hunted down and destroyed. But we've learned to live with them, more than that, to appreciate them. Now, we use rooikrans wood to build homes, furniture, and even sculptures. See that one there?" She pointed to a beautiful sculpture of an ant, an important seed disperser for Fynbos. "It reminds us that what's alien can become part of us, if we find new ways to relate." The boy nodded solemnly, as if grasping the weight of her words.



After the head of urban planning's statement, you could hear a pin drop in the room. "I know our policies are founded on multi-species entanglement, and coexistence, but do you honestly propose electing Fynbos plants to the council? How could they take part? We need to re-organise this city. How could they help?" a fellow architect exclaimed. Maya looked excitedly around the room, at the faces of her fellow council members. At the time, she was just a junior architect with radical ideas, but the AXP manifesto had taken deep root in her, and she was counting on the same being true of others in the room. She replied: "They already take part. Every day. They shape our air, our soil, our water. They teach us about time, adaptation, and care. What Mr. Ntuli proposes is not radical, it's recognition." The room was silent for a few moments, then another voice rose up: "If we are serious about rebuilding Cape Town, we must let the plants lead!" Then, one by one, voices began to rise in support. They had been fighting for an alternative life for

MAYA WAS PART
OF THE COUNCIL
AS A YOUNG ARCHITECT,
EVENTUALLY BECOMING
THE LEAD ARCHITECT

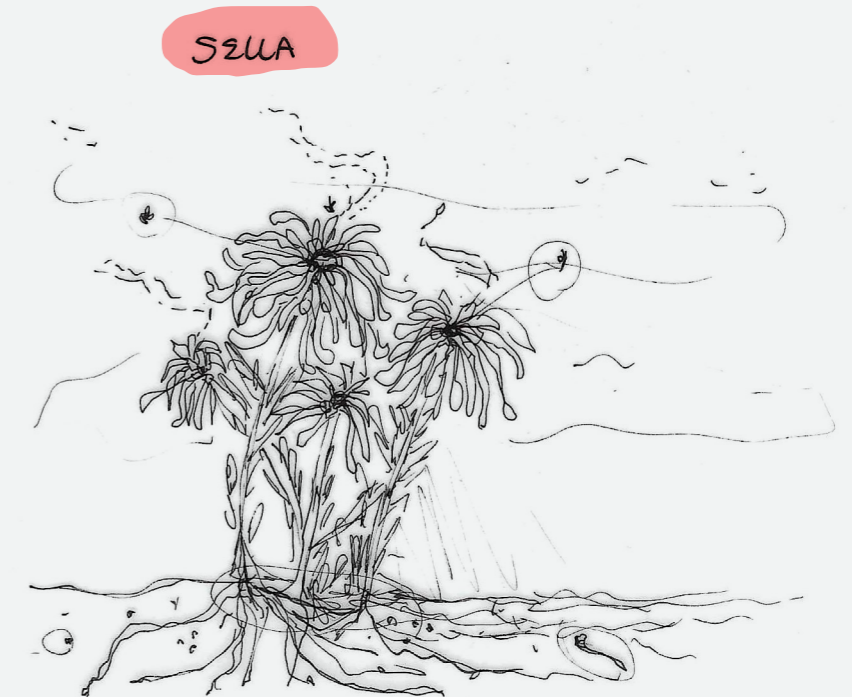
the city for years now, and finally the theories and proclamations of the AXP were going to be put into practice.

Majika darted through the winding paths of the sanctuary, weaving past patches of blooming fynbos. The scent of honey lingered in the air, carried by the late afternoon breeze, a reminder that the dry season was deepening. Out of the corner of her eye she saw Melo, crouched next to a **rooibos plant**, collecting leaves for her afternoon tea, a habit she shared with her older sister, Majika's mother, Maya. She ran up to her and excitedly yelled: "Hello, tannie, Melo!", which earned her a big bear hug from her aunt who playfully replied: "Hello stranger, Sella has been waiting for you all day, you better run there quick!"

Her *Amphibi-x* bounced lightly against her chest as she ran, her heart leaping with excitement. She knew exactly where Sella would be waiting. There, nestled in a sandy patch near a cluster of proteas was Sella, a spiderhead in full bloom. Her delicate, pale pink flowers unfurled like tiny hands reaching for the sun, a quiet act of becoming. "Sella!" Majika cried out, skidding to a stop in front of the plant. Majika slipped her Amphibi-x over her eyes, letting the layers of the landscape unfold. The world transformed before her. The spiderhead's fine, wiry stems glowed with an inner luminescence, roots stretching underground like veins through the soil. Above the surface,

ROOIBOS IS
A CONTESTED
PLANT AS A
MAJOR EXPORT
OF THE COLONIAL
ERA FOR TEA
MAKING

Sella's flowers swayed gently in the wind, but beneath, her roots wove an invisible network, connecting to other plants, exchanging life. She reached out to touch one of Sella's delicate blooms, careful not to bruise the fragile petals. "You've been waiting for me, haven't you?" she whispered. The wind stirred through Sella's flowers, shaking loose a few grains of pollen that sparkled like dust motes in the *amphibi-x*'s augmented view. It was as if Sella was answering her, in the only way she could.



Majika sat cross-legged in front of the spiderhead, lowering her *amphibi-x* so that she could see Sella with her own eyes. The world became simpler again, no glowing networks or shimmering particles, just a plant growing quietly in the sand. But Majika knew better. She knew that Sella wasn't just a static being. She was in constant transformation, opening, closing, adapting, surviving. Her roots

delved deep into the soil, reaching for hidden reservoirs of water. Her seeds lay dormant, waiting for fire to wake them up. “You’re not afraid of change, are you?” Majika said softly. As she stood up, she took one last look through the *amphibi-x*. The digital overlay revealed the spiderhead’s sprawling network once more, roots intertwining with other plants, soil teeming with microbial life, air carrying seeds to distant places. Majika ran her fingers through the air, imagining that she could catch the invisible threads binding everything together. Then she shouted a quick goodbye to her aunt, and continued on to her *klopse* class.

Maya stood and poured herself a cup of tea, made from rooibos she had harvested from the Bottom road community garden. The garden had grown into a sanctuary over the years, a space where humans and plants coexisted in mutual care. She was proud of how far the Flats had come. The Flats were still scarred by the past, but they were healing. And like the Fynbos, the people here knew how to thrive in difficult conditions. Her mind drifted to the upcoming council meeting. They were set to discuss the next phase of the project, reintegrating the old quarry into the Flats as a space of remembering and regeneration. For Maya, it was never just about urban planning. It was about reimagining the city as an entangled, living system, where every being, human and non-human, had a role to play. She thought of her daughter, Majika, born into a world transformed by

the project. Unlike Maya, who had lived through the old systems of separation and destruction, Majika couldn’t imagine a life that wasn’t intertwined with the Fynbos. She smiled as she thought of Majika’s habit of taking her *amphibi-x* device everywhere she went. Suddenly, a smell pulled her from her musings. She put on her boots, grabbed her hat and hastily made her way to the **contaminarium**.

The familiar rhythm of distant drums echoed through the streets, a sound older than Majika could comprehend. It was the heartbeat of the Cape Flats, a rhythm carried through generations, surviving displacement, fire, and drought. The cemetery was no longer a place of mourning but one of reclamation and celebration. Between old headstones, new life had emerged, fynbos plants growing where graves had once been, their roots weaving through the remains of history. It was here, in this contaminated soil, that the *Kaapse Klopse* gathered to practice. The dance floor was uneven, scattered with fragments of stone and earth, but that didn’t matter. This was a space between worlds, where memory and future collided, and the community forged new stories from the ruins of the old.

Majika joined the dancers, finding her place among her friends. The air vibrated with life as the brass band warmed up, their instruments shining in the late afternoon light. The dancers moved with joyful precision, their bodies

telling stories of resilience, survival, and celebration. Majika spun her colourful umbrella in time with the beat, her feet drumming against the earth. But even as she danced, something tugged at the edge of her awareness. The air was wrong. Her aunt had taught her to read the signs of the land, and now they pressed at her senses like an unspoken warning.



During a break in the music, Majika pulled out her *amphi-x* device and slipped it on. The world shifted again. Buildings faded into ghostly outlines, and the landscape transformed into a living tapestry of roots, spores, and temporal echoes. She turned toward the horizon, scanning for what had unsettled her. And then she saw it. Fire. The air shimmered with heat signatures, smoke already rising into the sky. Majika froze for a moment, her heart pounding. The fire was headed straight for the Contaminarium, For Sella. It was being led there. Missing buildings and burning only bush. Without a second thought, she grabbed her satchel and bolted from the cemetery. Her friends called after her, confused, but she didn't stop.

Fire plays a central role in narratives of the Cape

Throughout Fynbos Futures San stories are told. In oral versions, people added their own ancestral knowledge

At the contaminarium, Melo led a small group on a healing walk. She guided them to a patch of wild dagga and showed them how to prepare a tincture for coughs. At the Cape Snow Bush, she explained its use in ceremonies of cleansing and protection. "We call this plant kapokbos," she said, rubbing a sprig between her fingers. "It was used by the San people long before settlers arrived. It holds memory. When you inhale its scent, you connect with those who walked this land before us." As they walked, Melo spoke of contamination, not as something to fear, but as a condition of life itself. "We are all contaminated beings," she said. "Our bodies, our stories, our soil. We cannot pretend to be pure or separate. The key is to understand how we shape each other, how we grow together."

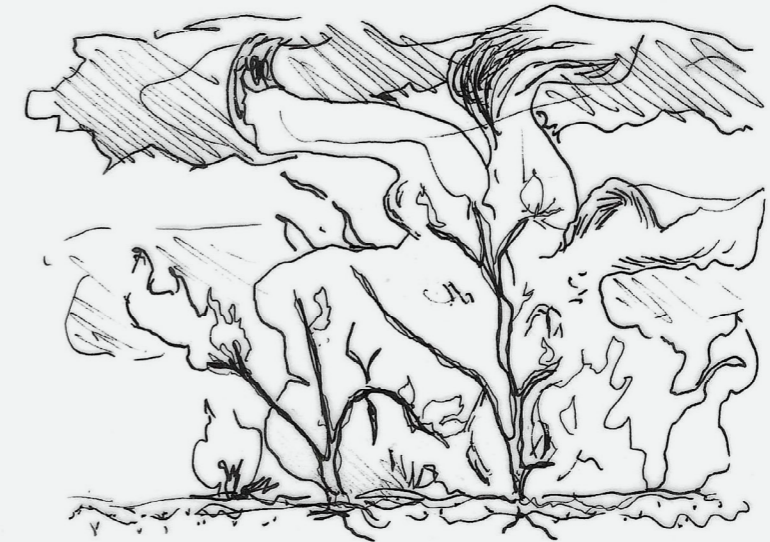
As she finished her sentence, she felt a shift in the air, a shift carrying the familiar scent of burning brush. Melo crouched down. She traced her fingers over the soil. The plants were thirsty, craving the fire as if it was rain. She knew this day would come, that the sanctuary would burn and that the community's hard work would be tested by flames. Still, seeing the smoke rise on the horizon unsettled her. As she stood watching, she saw her sister and niece running towards her from different directions. At least they would face this together.

The flames crackled, sending sparks spiralling into the darkening sky as the Contaminarium succumbed to the fire's grasp. Maya stood still, her gaze fixed on the inferno before her. The air shimmered with heat, twisting the outlines of the landscape, making it seem as though the world itself was shifting form. She felt a pang of sorrow for what was being lost, but beneath that sorrow, a sense of clarity. Ruin, she knew, was not an ending but a beginning. In the ashes of what was, new life would find a way to emerge.

Beside her, Melo wiped a tear from her cheek, her eyes glistening with both grief and understanding. The fynbos had evolved with fire, its seeds waited patiently for the flames to crack open their hard shells, releasing life into the world. She knew this was a necessary cycle, but it did little to ease her sense of loss. She mourned for the lives lost in the blaze, the insects, the birds, the plants themselves, all part of an ecosystem woven with delicate threads. Yet, even in her grief, she found solace in the knowledge that life would return, and return more vibrant than before.

Majika stood apart from them, her face illuminated by the flickering glow. Her heart raced, caught between fear and awe. There was something mesmerizing about the fire's dance, a terrible beauty in its relentless hunger. She felt drawn to it, unable to look away. The flames seemed alive, whispering secrets of renewal and transformation. She sensed Sella's

spirit resonating with the blaze, as if the fire held some part of her story. Majika shivered, not from the chill of the evening but from the realization that this was what Sella needed and wanted.



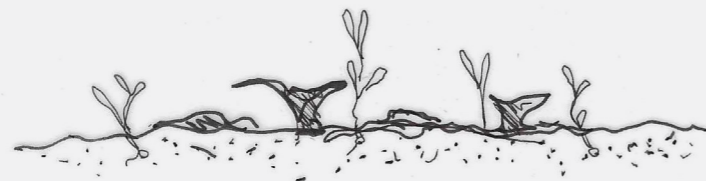
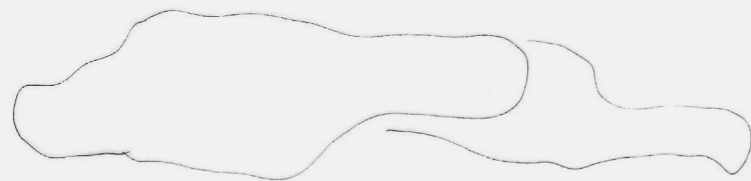
The three of them stood together, their hearts beating in time with the crackling flames, each moved by the fire in their own way. As the Contaminarium collapsed, embers rising like stars into the night, they felt a deep gratitude for the council's foresight. The fire had been allowed to burn where it was needed most, cleansing the land, opening space for new growth, while the homes of those nearby had been carefully protected. It was a delicate balance, a dance between destruction and preservation, and in this moment, they understood the importance of the Fynbos teachings.

Days after the fire, the contaminarium stood transformed, a landscape of blackened soil and skeletal branches, ghostly reminders of what had been. But amidst the ash,

Melo noticed the first signs of life. Tiny green shoots, fragile yet determined, pushing through the charred earth. She knelt beside one, brushing the leaves with reverence. "You see?" she said, her voice soft but steady as members of the community gathered close. "The fire doesn't cause endings. It prepares us to begin again."

Majika moved through the quiet ruins, her eyes searching until she found what she sought, Sella's remains, now a charred, jagged stump. Her fingers trembled as they traced the blackened bark. Grief weighed heavy in her chest, but she slipped on her *amphibi-x* device, her gaze sharpening as she peered into the soil. There, hidden beneath the surface, she saw it: life. Sella's seeds, germinated by fire, waiting to break free. Hope flickered in her heart.

Maya walked slowly through the sanctuary, her steps deliberate, her mind lingering on stories of her ancestors, stories of other fires, other renewals. She knelt



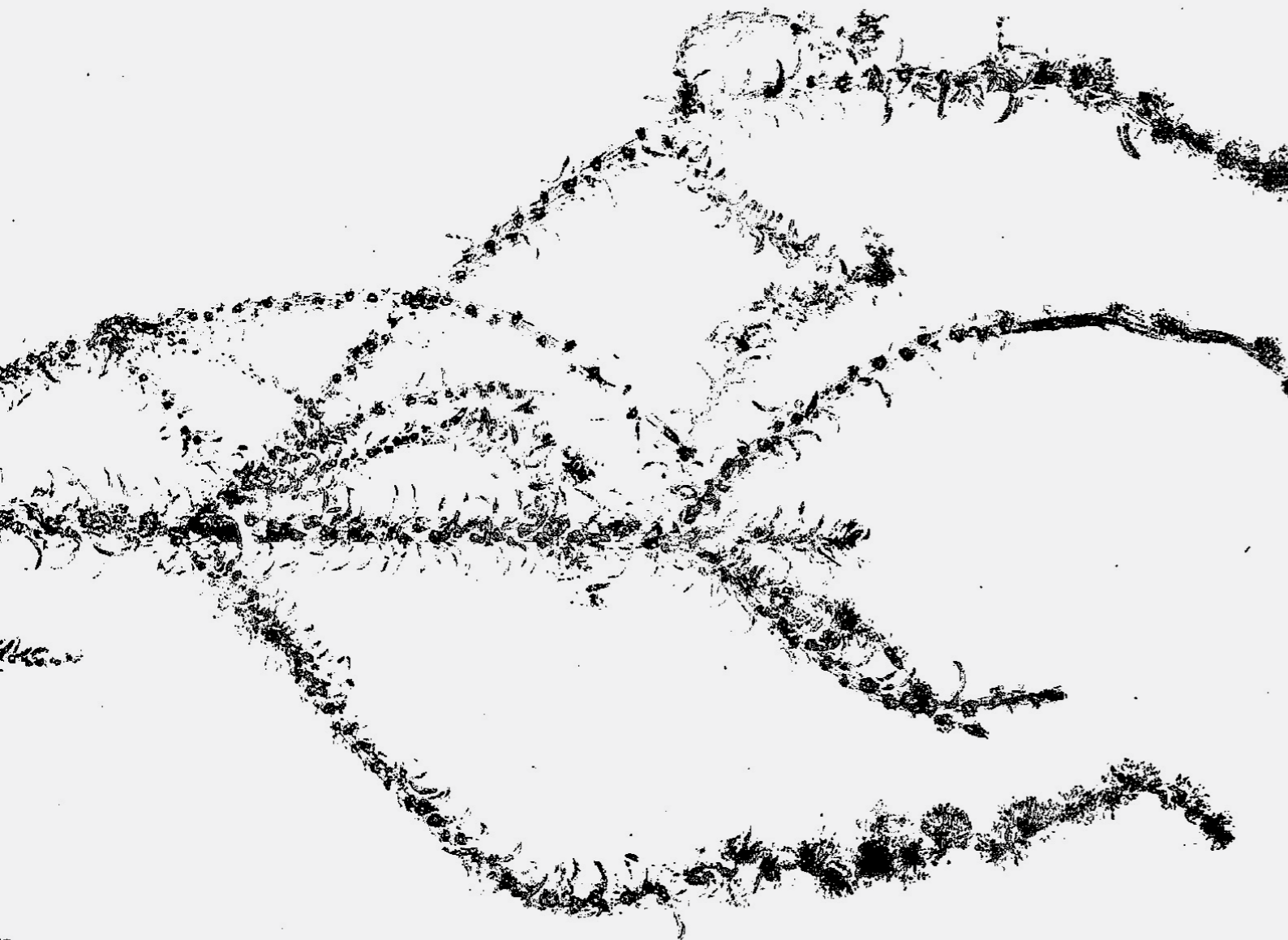
beside Melo and Majika, her hands pressing into the soil, feeling its warmth. She met their eyes, offering a quiet, comforting smile. Majika lifted her face, her voice clear and sure. "We are the seeds," she whispered. "We grow in the fire." Maya nodded, the words resonating deeply. They echoed through the charred landscape, carried by the wind, across the past, the present, and into futures yet to come.

IN THE MANUSCRIPT
THIS EPILOGUE FOLLOWED THE COLLECTION
OF STORIES

Epilogue

The Cape Flats had become a territory of kinship where plants were architects and humans their collaborators. The past was not buried but composted, and the future was no longer a distant horizon but an intricate field, waiting to be tended. The **Fynbos Futures project** did not save the Cape Flats, it reminded it how to live. And in doing so, it taught the rest of us how to begin again. Ultimately, the way of life in the Cape Flats extended far beyond the physical boundaries of the Flats, influencing global conversations about **urban design**, **ecological restoration**, and **social justice**. It proved that a post-natural future was not only possible but necessary, and that the wisdom of plants, rooted in their deep, spatial and temporal awareness and capacity for entanglement, offered a rich guide for navigating it.

THIS STORY
WAS ONE OF
THE FYNBOS
FUTURES
STORIES
THAT WAS
RE-TOLD THE
MOST, AS
IT REPRESENTED
HOPE &
RENEWAL FOR
THE FLATS



Fynbos Futures - Manuscript

Fiction as Design: Reimagining the Cape Flats Through Speculative Narratives

The fictional narrative presented in this chapter, drawn from the imagined speculative manuscript *Fynbos Futures*, is an invitation to think differently about the Cape Flats. As Garlick and Symons remind us, storytelling makes claims about "what matters, where the violence occurs, and how we might respond to it." In this chapter, storytelling acts as a design intervention, a means to narrate the entangled lives of fynbos and human communities within the Cape Flats. Through the imagined novel, fiction becomes a tool for challenging deterministic visions of collapse, offering instead a vision of resilience rooted in the relational ontologies of ubuntu, the political strategies of xeno-feminism, and the entangled perspectives of post-natural theory. The narrative of *We Are the Seeds* asks the reader to see the Cape Flats as more than a marginal, alienated territory. It invites us to view the territory as dynamic and evolving, shaped by ongoing negotiations between human and more-than-human agents, destruction and regrowth, past and future. Rather than providing idealised solutions, the story opens up transformative possibilities, spaces where boundaries between nature and culture, human and more-than-human, familiar and alien dissolve.

This chapter also raises critical questions about how speculative futures translate into spatial practices. What would it mean to live amphibiously in a landscape shaped by blurred boundaries between earth and sky, human and more-than-human, familiar and alien? How might a contaminated ecology, where life thrives through entanglement with other forms of life, reshape our understanding of urban spaces? And how can a multi-temporal approach to design account for the deep timescales of ecological processes, the immediate urgencies of human life, and the future trajectories of a post-natural territory? These questions point toward the spatial implications of living otherwise in the Cape Flats. The next chapter explores how fiction-friction can be translated into architectural practice, using the speculative lives of fynbos as design tools through which to reimagine the Cape Flats as an amphibious, contaminated, and temporal territory. By dissolving the borders between storytelling and spatial intervention, it proposes that speculative futures, rooted in collaboration, entanglement, and renewal, can shape the realities of our world.

06



Digitally manipulated and
traced monoprint of Fynbos
stems. Made by author and
Fynbos

Images of the Future

Re-imagining the Cape Flats

The fiction continues...

The stories of *Fynbos Futures* did not end with the final page of the manuscript. Even though they were never formally published, they became the stuff of legend, circulating through Cape Town like pollen in the wind, growing in significance with each retelling. Over time, these stories gained an almost cult-like status. They were shared orally in backyards, on street corners, and in community gatherings. New chapters were added by those who listened and imagined their own futures for the flats. The manuscript, once a work of fiction, became a tool for collective reimagining, a process of storytelling as spatial resistance. By the time the original texts were recovered decades later, it was strange to see how much the city had come to resemble the future the author had imagined. The Cape Flats, once defined by alienation and exclusion, had transformed into an amphibious, contaminated, and temporal territory, an evolving urban ecosystem shaped by both human and more-than-human agents. What began as fiction had generated enough friction to become reality, rewriting the spatial conditions of the Flats through collaboration, adaptation, and renewal.

A future for the Flats

This part of the thesis follows from the fictional narrative of the previous chapter and the opening passage of this chapter. It speculates on what the Flats might look like in a future shaped by the fiction-friction generated through the collaborative imagining of *Fynbos Futures*. It reflects on how the themes of the story could reshape urban practices and landscapes and considers how architecture might respond to blurred boundaries between soil and air, nature and culture, past and future. It examines what spatial practices could emerge from a messy, relational ecology where life thrives through contamination rather than purity, and how a temporal approach, accounting for the past, present, and future cycles of the territory, might shape it.

The chapter culminates in a diptych of architectural speculative drawings: a visual imagining of the spatial futures that the stories of *Fynbos Futures* might inspire and what the Flats could look like in 2040. The first drawing explores what it means to live amphibiously. The second visualizes an urbanism that embraces contamination, acknowledging the messy entanglements of life across species and

scales. The final drawing depicts a territory that responds to the deep timescales of the Flats while addressing the immediate urgencies of multi-species life and looking toward the future.

The speculative drawings are not blueprints for a fixed future. Instead, they are provocations, visual stories that challenge entrenched urban

paradigms and open space for continuous negotiation and adaptation. Through this chapter, the thesis invites the reader to see storytelling as more than a narrative device. Here, fiction becomes a spatial intervention, a tool for collective reimagining, and a catalyst for transformation. By reflecting on the speculative lives of fynbos, the chapter proposes an actionable vision for rethinking urbanism in the Cape Flats, an urbanism that is amphibious, contaminated, and temporal. It asks us to imagine a city shaped by contamination rather than separation, relation rather than exclusion, and continuous transformation rather than permanence.

The Amphibious Territory

In this future scenario, the Cape Flats is transformed into a dynamic amphibious territory, dissolving rigid boundaries between earth and air, human and more-than-human, urban and nature. This vision of amphibious urbanism embraces the double life of the land. It is rooted in the sandy soils of the Flats while simultaneously reaching into the atmospheric possibilities of the air. The drawing of this speculative urban landscape collapses conventional boundaries, presenting a borderless, porous cityscape where urban growth responds to the subterranean stories held in the soil and the future potentials carried in the air. By depicting below-, on-, and above-ground worlds on the same plane, the drawing emphasizes the blurring of these spaces into a singular, entangled whole.

The Soil

The sandy soil of the Flats, far from being inert, is presented as a living archive, pregnant with the past. Its granular texture carries traces of dispossession, ecological degradation, and colonial histories, refusing linear conceptions of time. These layered temporalities make the soil an active participant in shaping the amphibious territory. It resists being forgotten, guiding how urbanism unfolds in this future scenario. The drawing situates the soil as both a site of memory and a generator of new possibilities, demonstrating how urbanism can respond to the cues provided by the land's ecological and historical depths.

The Air

Above ground, the air in this amphibious urbanism becomes an active medium, alive with dispersion and regeneration. Floating imaginaries, seeds, spores, pollen, and speculative narratives, are carried by the wind, waiting to take root in fertile ground. This airborne potential highlights the city as a space of contamination and exchange, where the boundaries between the Cape Flats and the urban core of Cape Town dissolve. The air acts as a conduit, bridging spaces and fostering ecological and cultural entanglement. Through these aerial flows, the drawing imagines a future where urban form and function are shaped by an openness to interaction and mutual transformation.

Reciprocal Urbanism and Coexistence

The amphibious territory proposes a reciprocal urbanism, guided by principles of mutual flourishing between human and more-than-human agents. Urban growth no longer expands outward in a destructive sprawl but grows upward and downward, attuned to the rhythms of root systems, microbial life, and atmospheric flows. The drawing envisions a city where progress is measured not by economic growth or property value, but by the health of the soil, ecosystems, and the relationships between all forms of life. This amphibious urbanism fosters a more equitable and just mode of inhabitation.

Living Double

The amphibious territory provokes a reassessment of the complexity and entanglement of life. It challenges conventional notions of urbanism as unfolding in a singular dimension by presenting the territory as inherently multi-dimensional. Below-, on-, and above-ground spaces merge into a single, entangled whole. The territory exists simultaneously in the past, present, and future, rooted in historical memory, evolving in the present, and speculating on what might come. This layered understanding of time and space redefines how urban landscapes are imagined, inviting a more relational and dynamic approach to the city as a site of coexistence.

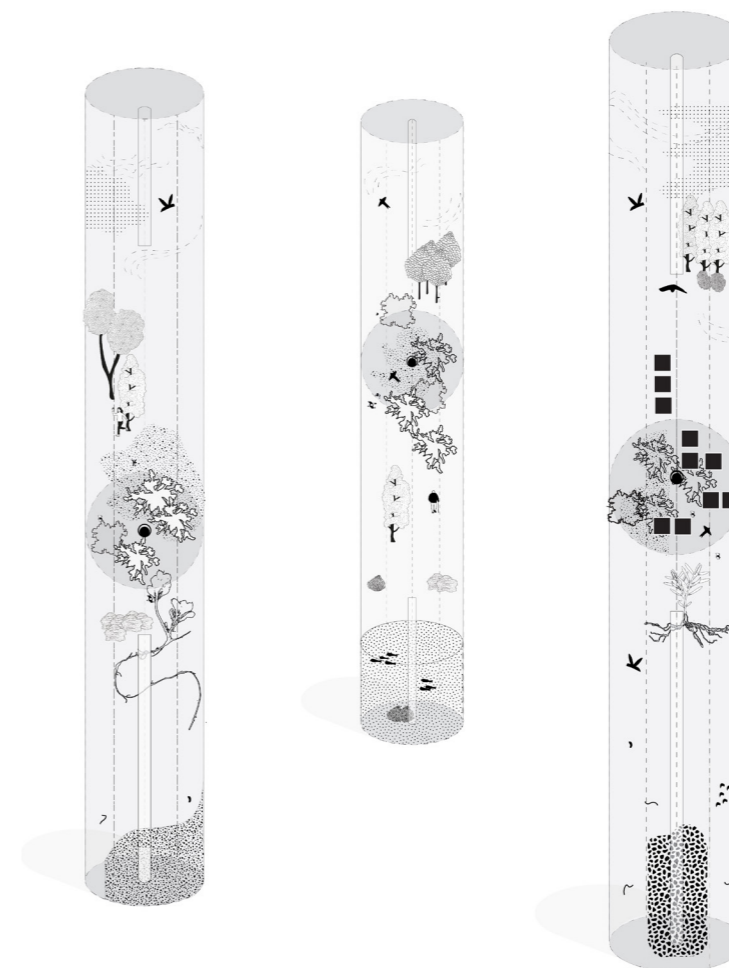
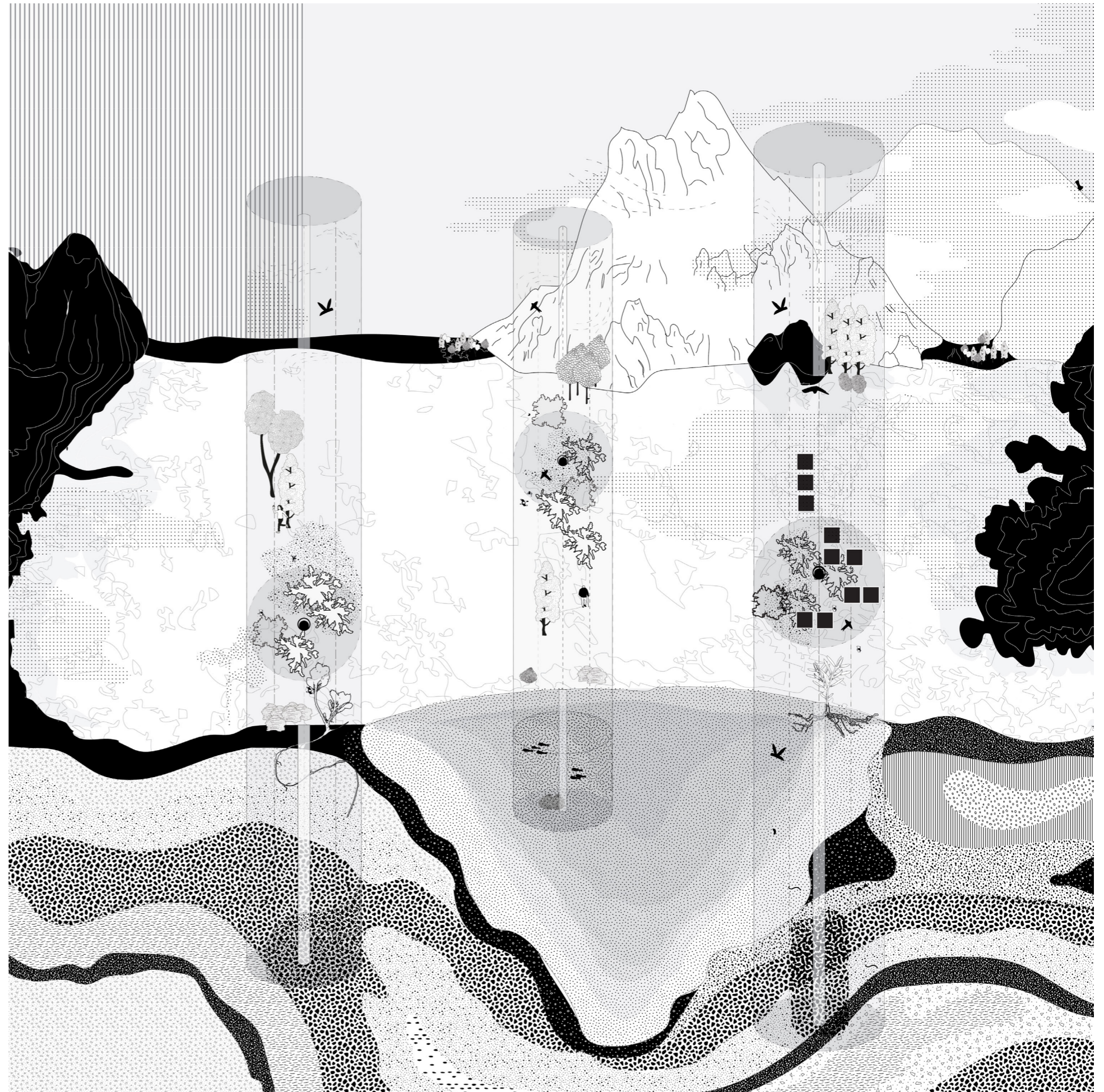


Figure 6.1 Detail of complete immersion in the landscape from the drawing: *The Amphibious Territory*

Figure 6.2 *The Amphibious Territory*, speculative drawing of a re-imagined future for the Cape Flats, where the Fynbos act of living double becomes a way of creating an alternative life in the Flats, one of social and ecological justice



The Contaminated Territory

The Cape Flats has always been a site of contamination—an entangled landscape marked by social inequality, alienation, ecological degradation, and urban nature. Far from being a negative condition, this contamination is reframed as an opportunity for urban flourishing. This drawing explores how embracing contamination as a foundational principle can lead to new, regenerative forms of urbanism. Rather than striving for purity, segregation, or separation, a contaminated urbanism acknowledges and works with the messy entanglements that define the site. Marginal spaces such as wastelands, abandoned plots, and degraded land are reclaimed as critical sites for regeneration and care, transforming the Cape Flats into a space of possibility.

Infrastructures of Care

Within this speculative vision, infrastructures of care emerge across the Cape Flats, reimagining neglected landscapes as multi-species commons. These spaces reject the concept of “pristine” conservation zones, such as those proposed in conventional biodiversity networks, in favor of active, living environments where humans and fynbos co-create shared futures. The drawing introduces urban interventions such as contaminariums, seed banks, soil repair stations, and other tools for ecological restoration and multi-species flourishing. These infrastructures are deeply relational, emphasizing mutual care and respect among all inhabitants of the Cape Flats—human and more-than-human.

The messy entanglements of this contaminated territory are depicted as threads of connection, weaving together the urban fabric. These threads not only heal fragmented landscapes but also hold the territory together, creating a network of shared resilience. This vision reframes contamination as a practice of care and connection, where the interwoven lives of species strengthen the Flats’ social and ecological systems.

Fynbos and the Politics of Urban Inclusion

In this speculative future, the fynbos biome is intentionally mixed into the urban fabric of the Cape Flats as a powerful political gesture. This act bridges the historic divide between the Flats and the inner city, dismantling spatial hierarchies and reasserting that beauty, flourishing, and ecological resilience belong to all. The drawing portrays this entanglement as a reminder that the mountain and the Flats are deeply interconnected and inextricably bound.

The fynbos becomes more than an ecological presence, it serves as a symbol of resistance against exclusion and inequality. Its adaptability and resilience embody a refusal to conform to boundaries and a celebration of contamination as a vital force for regeneration. By incorporating fynbos into the Flats, this vision reclaims agency for marginalised landscapes and communities, asserting that flourishing is not exclusive to privileged spaces.

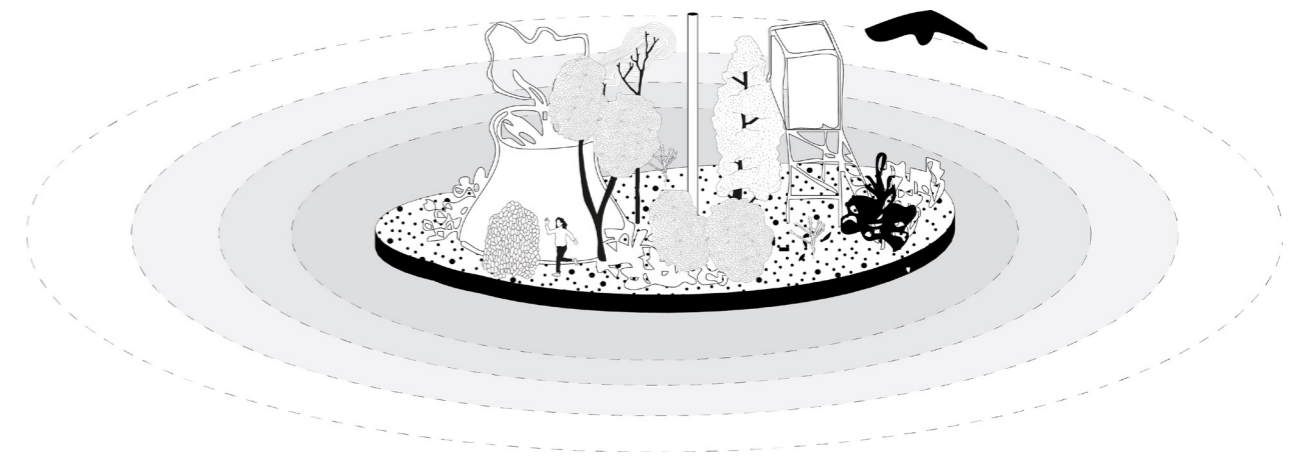


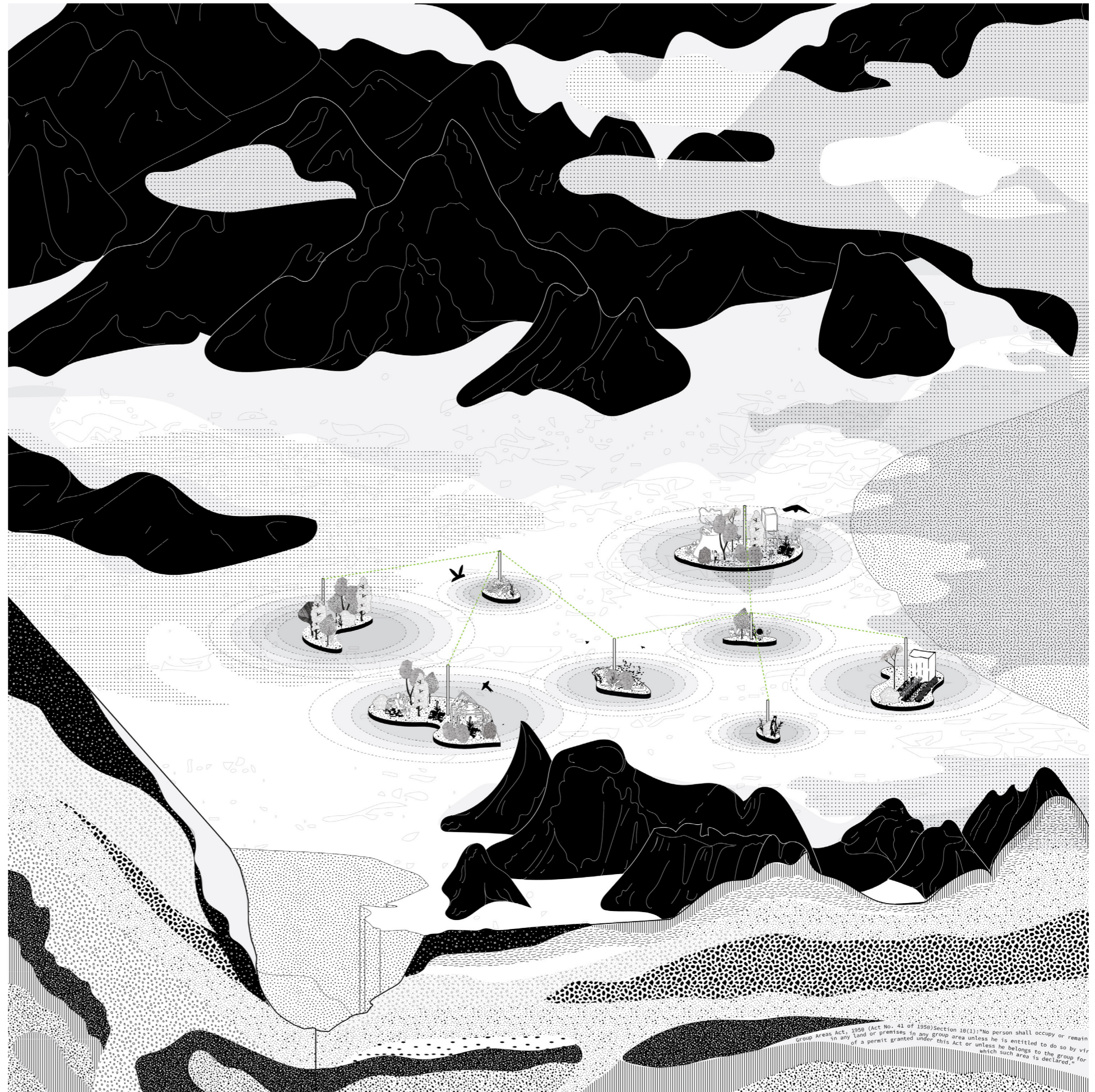
Figure 6.3 Detail of a link in the "Infrastructure of Care" in the drawing: *The Contaminated Territory*

Radical Inclusion Through Contamination

The contaminated territory proposes a radical practice of inclusion, where new ways of living emerge through messy entanglement. This approach challenges conventional urbanism by embracing complexity, relationality, and interconnectedness. The drawing envisions the Cape Flats as a place where ecological and social regeneration go hand in hand, with contamination serving as a catalyst for

transformation. By reframing contamination as a productive condition, this vision positions the Cape Flats as a site of resilience, care, and mutual flourishing. It invites a rethinking of urbanism itself, not as a means of control and purity, but as a collaborative and inclusive process that embraces the entangled realities of our shared world.

Figure 6.4 *The Contaminated Territory*, speculative image of the future of the Cape Flats if contamination was embraced as a way to be and organise in an alienated territory. The drawing depicts the entangled lives of beings in the Flats and showcases the "Infrastructure of Care", in this re-imagining of the Flats



The Temporal Territory

The Cape Flats is layered with temporalities, holding deep histories and future possibilities. From the precolonial landscapes that once defined its ecology to the apartheid-era zoning laws that entrenched social and spatial segregation, and now to the mounting pressures of climate change, the Flats embodies a palimpsest of timescales that continue to shape its present. Central to this layered temporality is the fynbos, a biome uniquely adapted to the seasonal rhythms and cycles of the Cape Flats. Fynbos plants follow intricate temporal patterns, with their growth, flowering, and seed dispersal intimately tied to the cycles of fire, rain, and wind. These plants are masters of adaptation, thriving in the nutrient-poor, sandy soils of the Flats and relying on ecological disturbances, such as periodic wildfires, to regenerate. The temporality of fynbos is one of renewal and resilience, deeply entangled with the past and future of the land.

The concept of the temporal territory acknowledges these overlapping timescales, proposing an urbanism that works with the past, present, and future as interconnected forces. The drawing envisions this speculative future by portraying the Cape Flats as a space where the past remains actively present, and the future is already unfolding. It rejects the linear progression of time often imposed by colonial and modernist frameworks, emphasizing instead the cyclical and entangled nature of history and possibility.

From Marginalisation to Autonomy

Historically, the Cape Flats has been relegated to the margins of Cape Town- geographically, socially, and economically. This

marginalization was deliberately orchestrated by apartheid spatial planning, which sought to isolate marginalized communities from the city's core and concentrate economic and political power in centralized areas. As a result, the residents of the Flats have long depended on the city's inner core for access to jobs, infrastructure, and essential services. The temporal territory reimagines this narrative, envisioning the Flats as an autonomous, self-sustaining space. In this speculative future, thriving local economies, community-driven infrastructures, and public services emerge from within the Flats rather than being imposed from external centres of power. Businesses, transportation systems, and social programs are integrated into the territory itself, creating a vibrant urban ecosystem that defies apartheid's legacy of exclusion and dependence.

The drawing provokes a critical question: How might the neighbourhoods of the Cape Flats be reshaped around local needs, histories, and futures, rather than imposed grids and external dependencies? The answer lies in reclaiming autonomy, centring local knowledge, and fostering systems that prioritise the resilience and agency of the community.

Urbanism Rooted in Ancestral and Ecological Knowledge

In this vision, urban planning on the Cape Flats moves away from the rigid, modernist zoning grids that have historically dominated city-making. Instead, it draws from the ancestral ecologies and social histories of the land, weaving these elements into contemporary urban design. The drawing emphasizes

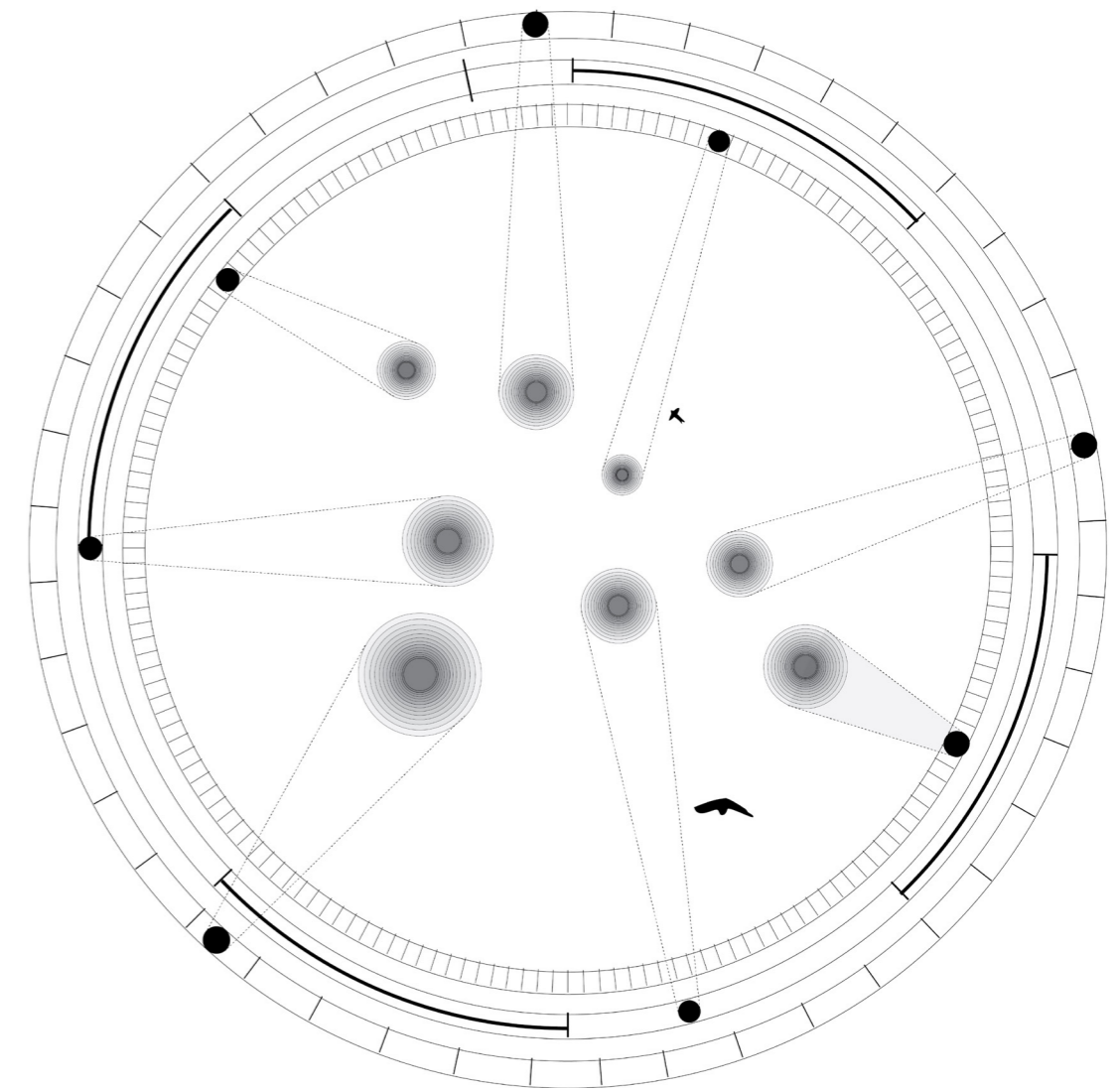


Figure 6.5 Detail of the cycles and seasonalities of the Flats in the drawing *The Temporal Territory*

layered temporalities, representing the injustices that shaped the Flats while fostering new possibilities that centre community resilience and ecological care. This approach honours the ancestral wisdom embedded in the land, using it as a guide for creating spaces that sustain both human and more-than-human life. The speculative drawing illustrates this balance, blending past resilience, present growth, and future potential into a single, unified urban vision.

The Cape Flats as a Temporal Centre

The temporal territory imagines a Cape Flats that resists the colonial logic of marginalisation and redefines itself as a

centre in its own right. In this reimagining, the Flats is no longer defined by its distance from Table Mountain or its proximity to the inner city. Instead, it is shaped by its ecological, social, and temporal rhythms into a vibrant urban system that stands on its own terms. This vision proposes a future where the Cape Flats honours the deep time embedded in its landscape, celebrates local knowledge, and fosters a regenerative urbanism. By centring the lives and histories of its inhabitants and the ecological systems it supports, the Cape Flats becomes an inclusive, resilient space. It offers a model for how cities can move beyond imposed hierarchies and engage with the complexities of time, space, and community in meaningful ways.

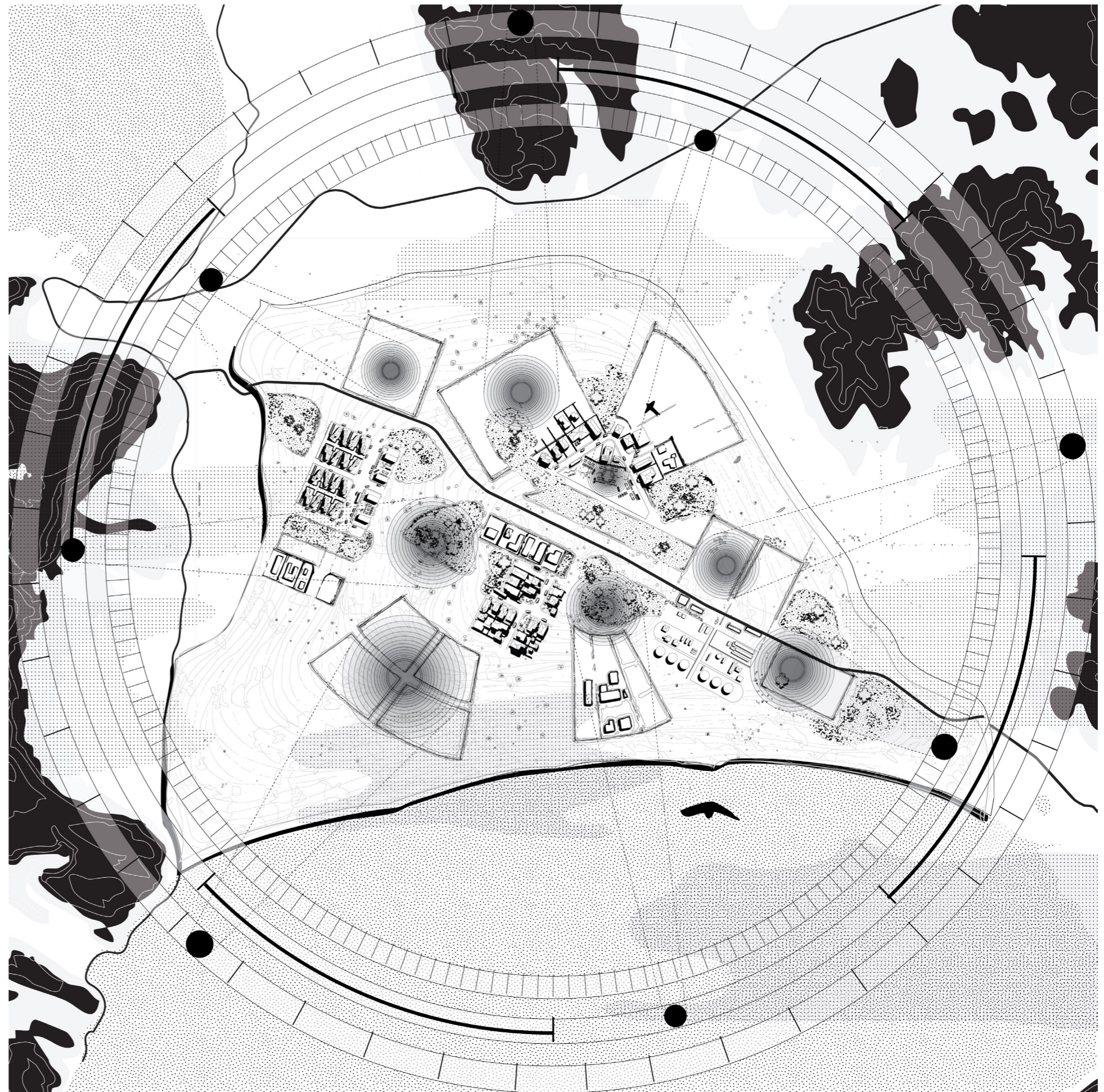
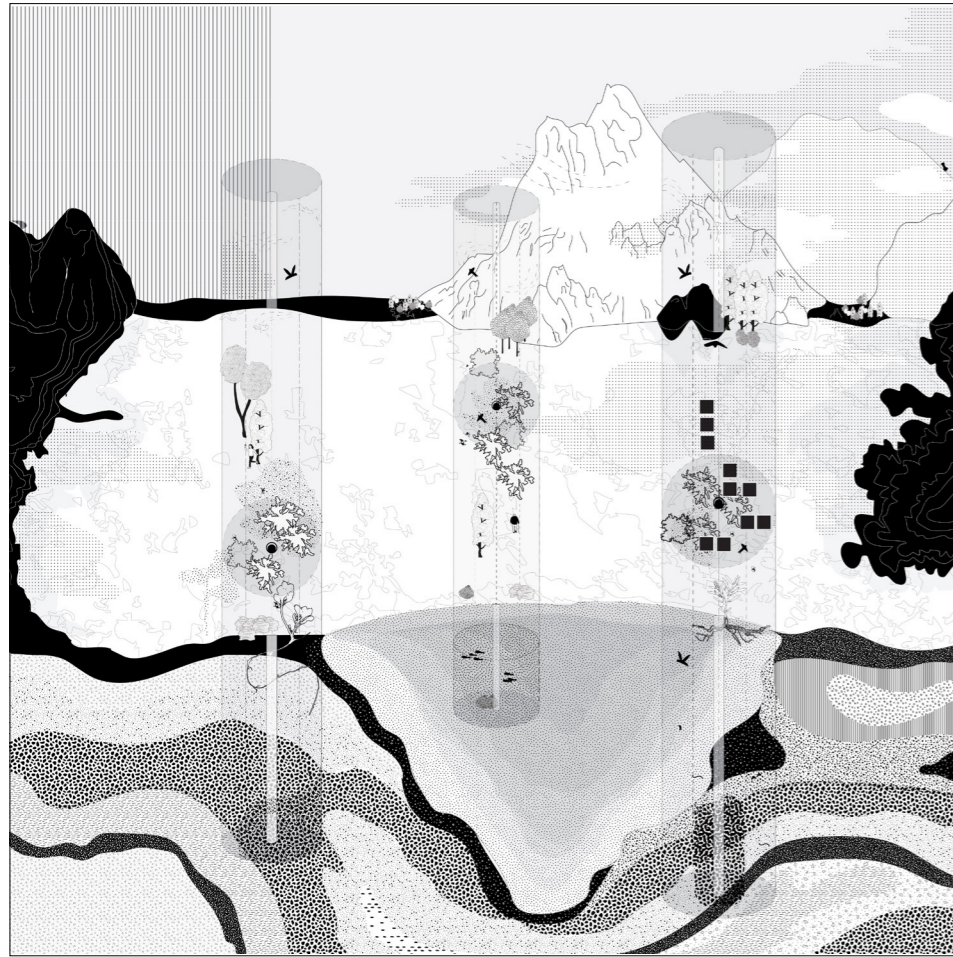


Figure 6.6 *The Temporal Territory*, shows the Cape Flats as an autonomous center that follows the temporalities of the territory in its growth and development

The Triptych of a Re-imagined Future for the Flats

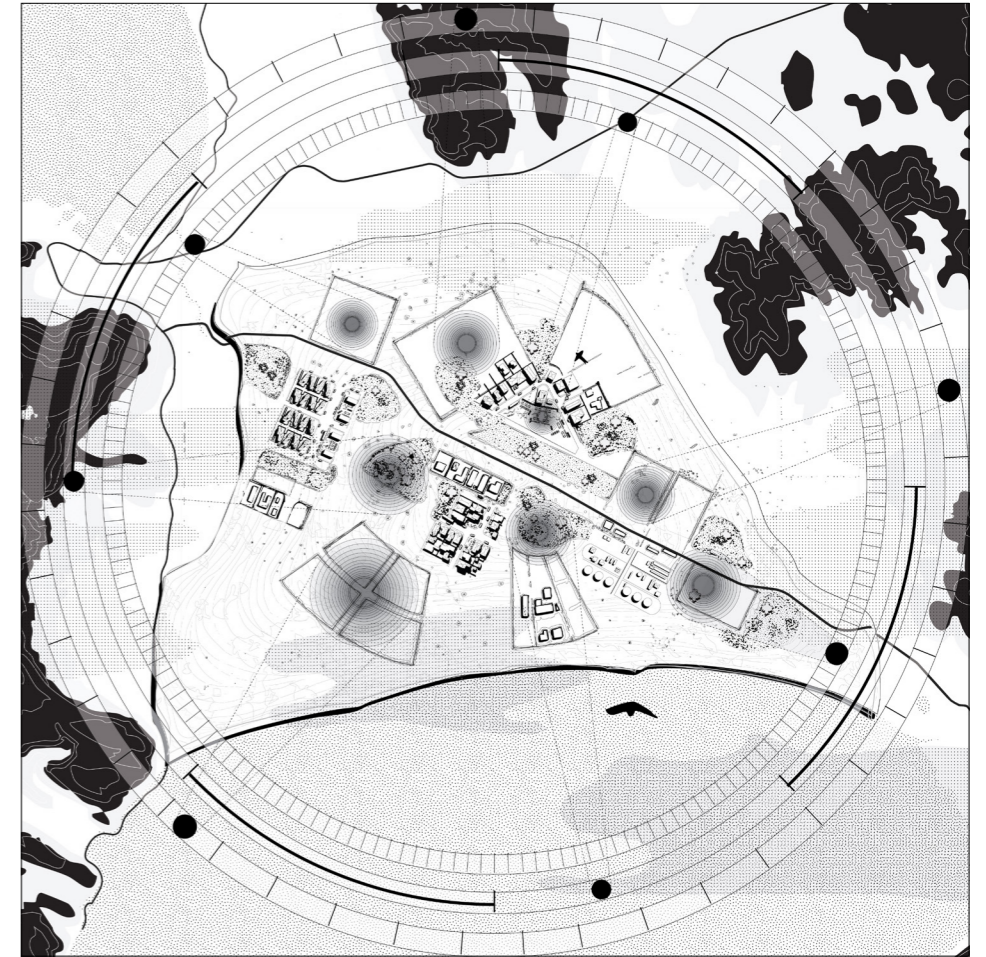
Amphibious



Contaminated



Temporal



In leu of a conclusion

These future scenarios do not offer fixed solutions or definitive answers. Instead, they present provocations that invite continuous negotiation and transformation and challenges the dominant narratives of separation, purity, and permanence that have shaped the spatial order of Cape Town and the Flats. The future of the Cape Flats, and of all urban spaces, depends on the ongoing process of imagining otherwise. This calls for the dismantling of colonial boundaries and the cultivation of inclusive, regenerative urban practices that blur the lines between nature and culture, past and future, earth and air. It demands that we see plants, stories, and communities as co-authors of space, as agents of transformation capable of shaping alternative futures.

This is not the end. The manuscript remains open, waiting for new chapters to be written. What futures will emerge from the seeds planted today? How will architecture respond to the challenges and possibilities of a post-natural world? The answers lie in the stories yet to be told, in the collective imaginaries yet to unfold. Through the act of imagining otherwise, we find the possibility of spatial resistance, an urbanism that grows through care, contamination, and entanglement, offering pathways toward more just futures.

Epilogue

This thesis has explored the Cape Flats as a contested site where socio-political alienation and ecological degradation intersect, emphasising the entanglement of marginalised communities with the critically endangered Cape Flats Sand Fynbos. In Part 06, the thesis came to an open-ended closure, with three potential future scenarios for the Cape Flats: *the Amphibious Territory*, *the Contaminated territory* and *the Temporal Territory*. These futures were imagined through the xenofeminist concept of alienation, where the tendencies and infrastructures of alienation, already persistent in the territory, were repurposed through an engagement with the *alien*, the *strange*, the *other*, in this case the critically endangered Fynbos plants. Through an acknowledgement of the Cape Flats as a post-natural territory, and by speculating on the worlding practice of plants, three characteristics of Fynbos lives, were combined with the principles of the imagined “Afroxenofeminist Manifesto for Cape Town”¹ from which a speculative future was created through fictional narrative as methodology.

The project of this thesis has critically engaged with Stefania Consigliere’s theory on Modernity’s paralysis of imagination², through a rejection of nihilistic visions of collapse, advocating instead for radical reimaginings of urban futures through situated speculation as a tool with which to navigate the socio-political and ecological conditions of a damaged planet. By foregrounding urban nature and the agency of plants, it addresses the exclusionary legacies of colonialism and apartheid and challenges the current capitalistic paradigm. Through the coined concept of *fiction-friction*, the thesis proposes the use of fictional narratives as supplemental design tool in architectural practice to bridge speculative imaginaries with actionable futures, through collective mutation. The objective of the thesis was to reframe

architecture as a collaborative, multi-species practice, using *fiction-friction* to explore speculative urban futures.

“It matters what thoughts think thoughts. It matters what knowledges know knowledges. It matters what relations relate relations. It matters what worlds world worlds. It matters what stories tell stories”³

are the words of Donna Haraway, with which this thesis opens. This quote acted as a springboard from which the project was conceptualised. Through her foregrounding of the entanglement of thought, knowledge and relationality, Haraway calls for speculation and fictional storytelling that recognises the power of imagination to challenge dominant power structure and to shape the future. This thesis takes up this call by proposing *fiction-friction* as mechanism to illustrate how speculative storytelling, that is situated and includes the more-than-human, can catalyse new ways of inhabiting the Cape Flats and the world.

The concept of fiction-friction, developed in this thesis, bridges speculative fiction and material reality to reimagine architectural practice. It moves beyond conventional problem-solving to instead embrace imaginative, situated possibilities. *Fiction-friction* views alternative futures not as fixed endpoints but as dynamic, evolving processes shaped by continuous negotiation. Its adaptability makes it particularly effective for

addressing complex, multi-scalar challenges like climate change and urbanisation. By embedding speculative fictions in contested territories such as the Cape Flats, *fiction-friction* can disrupt entrenched systems and inspire real change.

From the outset it was important to gain the right vocabulary through which to speculate on the future of the Cape Flats. To create a situated response to the contested territory it was necessary to understand the conditions of alienation left by the socio-economic, spatial and ecological practices of the colonial and apartheid regimes and the dualistic ideology of the modern, capitalistic paradigm. An important aspect here was including the fynbos plants and their exclusion in this investigation. Through the inclusion of the more-than-human the anthropocentric nature of architectural practice is challenged.

Following from this situated investigation, the next step was to create a theoretical frame of knowledge, through which to reimagine the territory. The critique of dualisms and the proposal to move to methods of thinking otherwise acknowledged the importance of the vocabulary through which the future is proposed. Through this development, the site was re-acknowledged as a post-natural territory, where nature and culture are inextricably intertwined. The post-natural condition necessitates a shift in how we approach the design and governance of cities. In this context, architects are uniquely positioned to act as mediators between speculative imaginaries and material realities. This thesis proposes that architecture, as a practice inherently rooted in imagining and shaping futures, should embrace hybrid methodologies that draw from theory, fiction, and ecology to navigate the complexities of our current socio-political and ecological condition.

The thesis then proposed that the principles with which to speculate on alternative futures should be grounded in a synthesis of xenofeminist principles, that reject naturalisation and call for alienation as generator of new worlds, and the relational philosophy of ubuntu that acknowledges human and more-than-human entanglement and is rooted in mutual care and preparation for the future. The notion of alienation as it is reinterpreted through the lens of *afroxenofeminism*⁴, underscores the potential of architecture to embrace the unknown. Rather than smoothing over tensions, *fiction-friction* magnifies these frictions, transforming them into productive sites for envisioning actionable futures.

By foregrounding plant agency, specifically that of the Cape Flats fynbos, this thesis proposes that humans are not the only inhabitants and producers of urban space. In the Cape Flats, the speculative qualities of fynbos as amphibious, contaminated and temporal offer alternative ways of inhabiting the Flats, that resist colonial legacies and envision more inclusive futures. The inclusion of Fynbos agency in the reimagination of the Cape Flats, challenges exclusionary urban paradigms that continue to marginalise both people and more-than-humans. The key contribution of this work lies in its re-framing of architecture as an active participant in multi-species worlding. By centring Fynbos plants as co-authors of urban imaginaries, the research challenges anthropocentric legacies and opens pathways for hybrid ecologies that embrace precarity, entanglement, and mutual transformation. The amphibious, contaminated, and temporal characteristics of Fynbos plants are translated into speculative territorial imaginaries, that hope to demonstrate the generative possibilities of working with more-than-human agencies to reimagine urban futures.

¹ See Part 02, Appendix A.

² Stefania Consigliere, *Fables of Re-Enchantment. Multiplicity, Imaginary, Revolution*, trans. Steven Colatrella (2020; repr., New York: Minor Compositions, 2024).

³ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham (NC): London: Duke University Press, 2016), 35.

The creation of *Fynbos Futures*, the fictional narrative that accompanies the theoretical research of the thesis, illustrates how fiction can serve as more than just a critique of current conditions but as a generative tool to see how imagined futures as realisable possibilities. The fictional narrative's embrace of hybridity, coexistence and transformation mirrors the methodological approach of the thesis itself. It challenged the binaries between theory and imagination, fact and fiction and embraces a plural and relational understanding of urban ecologies. By leveraging *fiction-friction* as both a methodological and speculative tool, the thesis hopes to show how architects can move beyond deterministic solutions of urban development, fostering instead futures that are imaginative, relational, and constantly mutating.

Embracing Speculation and *Fiction-Friction* in Architectural Practice

This thesis ultimately proposes that the role of architects in our current paradigm must go beyond designing deterministic solutions for space, but to embrace speculative practice in order to contribute to the shaping of urban futures that reject narratives of inevitable collapse, opting instead to foster futures that address the challenges of our current condition with hope, creativity and responsibility. The importance of architectural practice on a damaged planet is not in the creation of perfect solutions but in the imagination of open-ended, participatory processes of future-shaping that engage multi-species actors to shape our shared spaces. By practicing *fiction-friction* and embracing multi-species worlding, we can

transform architecture into a discipline that creates speculative futures where the boundaries between natural, human, and technological are dissolved.

The aim of the thesis was to challenge nihilistic narratives of apocalyptic inevitability and urban decay by advocating for a speculative, post-natural approach to urbanism. Through the lens of *fiction-friction*, it demonstrated how imagination, storytelling, and architectural

design can serve as critical tools for imagining alternative futures. The Cape Flats, as a site of layered colonial and ecological histories of alienation, has been central to this exploration, revealing how the entanglement of human and more-than-human agencies, particularly the agency of plants, can offer new frameworks for addressing exclusion, inequality, and environmental degradation in urban spaces.

In closing, as architects, it matters what futures we imagine. By embracing speculative practice and multi-species entanglement, we can co-create futures where humans and more-than-humans thrive together, weaving narratives that transform alienation into belonging and imagination into reality.

4
Afroxenofeminism is a speculative hybrid of the relational African philosophy of Ubuntu, see for example: Mogobe B Ramose, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (Harare: Mond Books, 1999); and the xenofeminism proposed by Laboria Cuboniks, see: Laboria Cuboniks, *The Xenofeminist Manifesto* (Verso Books, 2018).



Fynbos monoprint made by the author in collaboration with the Fynbos. Used for the cover of the fictional manuscript of *Fynbos Futures*

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Emerging from a world entangled in climate and socio-political crisis, this thesis situates itself within the neo-colonial city of Cape Town, where the legacies of colonialism and apartheid planning have alienated the Cape Flats territory from the rest of the city. The Cape Flats is both a site of urban inequality and home to the critically endangered Cape Flats Sand Fynbos, a biome unique to the city, that faces unprecedented extinction due to urbanisation. Through this entanglement of city and urban nature, the thesis examines the intersections of urban space, political ecologies and marginalised histories. Through the project of this thesis, the degradation of the Cape Flats Sand Fynbos and the socio-spatial inequalities of the Cape Flats become a testing ground for alternative political imaginaries centred on visibility, belonging, and equity.

Fynbos Futures advocates for radical reimaginings of urbanism through speculation as an essential tool for navigating the post-natural condition of a damaged planet. It challenges the exclusionary legacies of colonialism and apartheid while embracing more just, inclusive, and hybrid urban ecologies. Through the concept of fiction-friction, it bridges speculative imaginaries with actionable futures, demonstrating how fictional narratives, when combined with architectural methodologies, can make alternative possibilities visible, tangible, and compelling. In doing so, the thesis positions architecture as a critical practice of world-making, one that transforms speculation into a catalyst for shaping more inclusive futures.