ROCK | WATER | LIFE

ecology & humanities for a decolonial south africa

LESLEY GREEN

With a foreword by Isabelle Stengers

ROCK | WATER | LIFE

ROCK |

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for Nazeer, Susanna, Sinegugu, Nonhle, Bazooka,
Selene, Serge, Jenni, Davine, Maryam, Noora, Caron
connectors of rock, water, life

Whether we like it or not there is
at the present time an eminent, tentacular civilization.
Because it is clear that now we have entered the era of the finite world. . . .
Still more,
with modern European thought was born a new process . . .
a process of reification, that is,
the thingification of the world. . . .
The consequence you know,
it is the appearance of the mechanized world,
the world of efficiency
but also the world in which people themselves become things.
In short
we are facing a gradual devaluation of the world,
which leads quite naturally to an inhuman world
on whose trajectory lies
contempt, war, exploitation of humans by humans.

—Aimé Césaire, speaking at the
Festival mondial des arts nègres in Dakar, 1966

Here in South Africa, we are always in the crucible.
There are never any shortcuts. All we can do is to be present.

—Jennifer Ferguson

How should we construct our question
so that it has a chance of interesting those to whom we ask it
and a chance of receiving interesting answers?

—Isabelle Stengers and Vinciane Despret

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FOREWORD

The most adequate rendering of what Lesley Green's book asks her readers to accept feeling, thinking, and imagining might well be expressed by her quotation of singer and poet Jennifer Ferguson: "Here in South Africa, we are always in the crucible. There are never any shortcuts. All we can do is to be present."

As an academic working at the University of Cape Town, Lesley Green was indeed present in the spring of 2015, when activist students and staff obtained the removal of the statue of Cecil John Rhodes that dominated the campus; and again in October 2015, when the #FeesMustFall protest followed the #RhodesMustFall one, and, ten months later resurged with the demand for a free, decolonised education for all. To be present, however, does not mean simply to be there. It means allowing oneself to be affected; to give up one's reasons, however legitimate; to pick and choose; or to object on this point or the other. It means feeling that there are times when such reasons create a distance, the luxury of an aloofness only "whiteness" allows.

During my stay in Cape Town, just after the 2015 protests, Lesley and I talked a lot about whiteness and the terrible feeling that the trust in the possibility of a "Rainbow Nation" had dissipated as a dream—back into the crucible as the quasi-miraculous shortcut willed by Nelson Mandela was falling apart. Donna Haraway's motto, "staying with the trouble," was all the more haunting.

I had come to Cape Town to meet with Lesley and work with her students on the particular situation of environmental humanities in South Africa. I understood from her writing that environmental questions in the post-apartheid context are folded in explicit conflictual entanglements that make the possibility of consensus, that is, of "sensing together," a fully developed challenge. Here nothing is innocent. You cannot forget, when you are concerned by the devastation of the environment, that this concern was, and is

still, the justification for protection that has meant fencing away marauders and poachers, defending "nature" against the menace of humans who happen to be poor, and are thus invariably black. But here also, disempowered fishers had felt authorised to examine and learn collectively how to question the ways in which, in the name of science, they were excluded from decision-making processes that concerned them. Lesley's chapter about the politics associated with the fixing of fishing quotas offers an inspiring example of how disempowered people were able to contest the rationale of a so-called objective (managerial) scientific argumentation in Parliament.

What could a country where the need to decolonise ways of thinking, imagining, and doing is taken seriously teach us all? Could post-apartheid South Africa endorse the challenge of environmental justice? Could this place where injustice once ruled supreme, and where the reference to dignity now had a political power of its own, be a fostering place for the invention of a social ecology of knowledges and experiences? The question was all the more important because South Africa had already experienced the perils of simply placing "white" and "indigenous" knowledges in opposition—the mistake made by former president Thabo Mbeki when, as Lesley concludes about the tragic bungling of the AIDS crisis, he tried to change the players on a chess board, instead of changing the game itself.

During my stay, Lesley and her students made me understand that my hopeful interest was, if not misplaced, at least hard to foster at a time when the very legacy of Mandela's Rainbow Nation was sinking into the anger and disillusionment of the younger generation, the feeling that "whites" had cheated both them and their future. But they did so in a way that taught me what it took to attend to this anger rather than to "correct" it with the certainly true, but oh-so-easy argument: that what reduced the Rainbow Nation to an impossible dream was first of all the acceptance of the "neoliberal" promise, the reification of economic growth as the only way to bring general prosperity and consensus.

It would have been easy, and true, to plead that if anger targets whiteness, it should acknowledge that the meaning of whiteness has changed. It is no longer synonymous with discrimination but rather with "whitewashing"—that is, with wiping away any active memory of whatever would empower resistance: those responsible have no particular colour, nor ideological stance—ideology is a thing of the past. We are all now constrained to serve anonymous necessity, or, as Lesley writes, the three interlocked gods of reason: technical efficiency, economic productivity, scientific objectivity. In other words, such a proposition offers to share a sad, impotent lucidity—"you" should not mistake us for your enemies; "we" are all in the same boat, suffering the same hegemony.

Berthold Brecht famously wrote that we speak about the violence of the river when it drags everything with it, but we never call violent the banks that channel it. As an inhabitant of academia, I must recognise the way it channels successive generations of students into thoughtlessness. Even critical lucidity, as cultivated by academics tirelessly analysing and denouncing the tentacular power of the neoliberal domination, does not help very much when it is a question of imagining how to escape the hold of the three gods mentioned above. Indeed, academic critique seldom creates ways of sustaining the imaginative and practical resources liable to be reclaimed against domination. Rather, it prioritises the danger of being seduced into thinking that those resources could be up to the task. The thesis that it is easier to anticipate the end of the world than the end of capitalism has been repeated as a manner of academic mantra. Engraining the fear of being duped—or being shown by colleagues to be duped—in the minds of generations of students may be seen as a free gift from the critical academy to capitalism.

Lesley's book engages this issue in an intensively situated manner, fully accepting that as a daughter to a family where the fear of shame in nonconformity with whiteness was massaged into her skin, she cannot accept the comfort of academic distancing. It is no longer sufficient to remember that as a student, she became an active part of the anti-apartheid protest movement. Facing an anger that identifies her as a "white" academic, she has chosen to abandon the protection of academic conformity, but not to side with the anger. She has accepted learning, thinking, and suffering with what anger risks forgetting—the land and its rocks, waters, and living inhabitants. She has transformed the writing of this book, rich in knowledges and documentation, into a journey into feeling, opening herself to the ghosts, to the voiceless presence of those, humans and non-humans, who were, and go on being, victims of the gods of reason.

What readers will discover is an entangled double rendering: of haunted landscapes, and of a researcher who turns "reflexivity" into the art of letting herself be affected by past and present socio-ecological devastation in order to become able to stay with the trouble; to refuse analytical understanding of its power to distance. She does not go beyond the facts. There is no beyond when one tells about destruction and mutilation. She remembers, remembers, rearticulates what was done to this country, and is not transmitted to the students of her university—or only as deplorable but cold cases. Yet she cannot participate in the angry decolonising slogans of those students against "Science," because she knows that refusing white knowledge *en bloc* is a trap. Their enemies play at being horrified but are really delighted when listening on the internet to a student claiming that "science as a whole is a product of Western modernity, and the whole thing should be, like, scratched

off"—a video that went viral. But she can learn to feel in the very fibres of her being how right they are to contest the kind of unthinking, unfeeling objectivity they are taught to conform to.

The succeeding "Fallist" movements were born in universities, places which are today all over the world under the yoke of neomanagerial governance and the unrelenting pressure for "breakthroughs" ensuring competitive innovation. As such, their task is to address continuously renewed generations of students, whom they have to convince over and over again that the way they are trained makes sense. Most of the time it works, and the disappointed and recalcitrant ones simply disappear. But from time to time, the institution's bluff is called, and the river overflows its banks. Even if such events are transient, they are not the expression of some utopian dream; rather, they are an awakening from a sleepwalking routine by a gust of vital questions—questions that make our definitions of knowledge stagger because they open to an outside these definitions ignore. Coming back to the challenge of decolonising universities and the kind of knowledges they produce and transmit, we all ignore what this challenge entails and demands, and students do not know better. What they know instead is that what they are presented with has the dubious effect of making them forget the question.

Lesley has allowed herself to be haunted by the question, to stay with the trouble, while the academically safe position would have been to analyse the incapacity of the institution to answer the decolonising challenge. She works with this challenge, works for a future that would include her children together with those students and staff who refuse the bitter reality that is stealing their own future. Her stance reminds me of John Dewey's call to his social sciences colleagues, when he wrote in 1922: "Be the evils what they may, the experiment is not yet played out. The United States are not yet made; they are not a finished fact to be categorically assessed."[1] Today, the call to resist matter-of-fact assessment may reverberate everywhere on this earth, as everywhere what is categorically assessed is the way we participate, eyes wide open, in the ever-accelerating unravelling of the earth's entangled socio-ecological worlds. But Dewey's call has a special meaning in South Africa. Here it is a question of reclaiming the legacy of an actually experimental weaving, of refusing to betray the trust that made this now-unravelling dream possible.

Reclaiming means reacquainting oneself with generative resources, resources that sustain and inspire. Lesley proposes that her readers remember that the trust in the possibility of weaving together different voices and perspectives was born of the African soil, this soil from which colonisation has cut people off. The African "dilemma tales" do not honour confrontational truth, as cherished by our academic tradition, with authors rivalling for authority. They stage

situations as multi-authored ones, gathering human and non-human protagonists, experiencing them with their own perspective, and participating in them in their own ways. Against the blind and brutal shortcuts proposed by the gods of reason, such tales demand from those who claim to care for a situation—teachers and researchers, for instance—the capacity to cultivate thinking and imagination that would not be about what this situation should conform to, but that enable them to stay alongside as it unfolds.

Learning to think alongside more and more troubled and troubling situations may be a vital challenge, and a demanding relevant substitute for the conquering machine that has been called reason. Lesley's journey into the South African crucible shows us a path for reclaiming an exercise of reason worth keeping in the hard times which are coming.

—Isabelle Stengers, Université Libre de Bruxelles

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An early version of the introduction was invited by Deborah Posel for a workshop at the University of Cape Town with Rob Nixon, and that event kicked off the entire Environmental Humanities South project. Some parts of that paper appeared in the journal *Resilience* (volume 1, issue 2) in 2014.

Chapter 1: In 2012, the African Climate and Development Initiative's Bergrivier workshop team started me thinking about rivers and water, and the Berg River supply to Cape Town. Caron von Zeil pointed me to the streams and the importance of their history. Henrik Ernstson invited me to share an early draft with his urban natures team. Nick Shepherd organised the walking workshop in the Table Mountain National Park. The team at Kaskazi Kayaks got me paddling in Table Bay, which provided insight into the relationships of bay, city, mountain, streams, and history.

Chapter 2 began on a committee for the University of Cape Town's Shale Gas Working Group, initiated by Marilet Sienaert and chaired by Dean Francis Petersen. Eduardo Viveiros de Castro suggested I present some of the Karoo material at the Thousand Names of Gaia workshop in Rio in 2014, and thought with me at length about cement. A section of the chapter was published by Jan Glazewski and Surina Esterhuyse in 2016. Thank you to Leonie Joubert, Ben Schoeman, Isa Marques, Nathan Honey, Lawrence van der Merwe, and Miriam Waltz for the off-season trip to the AfrikaBurn installation on fracking; and to Pedro Neves Marques for the invitation to write the Changing of the Gods of Reason piece, which responded to the work of the Rhodes Must Fall collective at the University of Cape Town. Thank you to all who commented on the piece at the Ethnographic Engagements seminar at

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Near Cape Point. Photo: Lesley Green

INTRODUCTION

DIFFERENT QUESTIONS, DIFFERENT ANSWERS

Baboons. Porcupines. Otters. Lynx. African genet cats. Crayfish. Sharks.
Dusky dolphins. Killer whales. Southern right whales.
Seals.
Owls. Fish eagles. Black eagles. Sugarbirds. Sunbirds. Oystercatchers.
African penguins. Black-shouldered kites. Rock kestrels.
Harlequin snakes. Puff adders. Rinkhals. Cape cobras. Mole snakes.
Olive house snakes.
Bloukopkoggelmanders.
Tortoises. Baboon spiders. Scorpions.
Stick insects. Cicadas. Praying mantis.
Duikers. Steenbokkies.
Copper blue butterflies.

These are some of the 351 air-breathing creatures that traverse the edges of Cape Town, South Africa, amid the suburban islands of the south peninsula around which the Indian Ocean swirls into the Atlantic. A fence crosses from one ocean to the other, marking the edge of Cape Point Nature Reserve. The fence stops the eland, the bontebok, the rooibokke, the ostriches, and the law-abiding. To pass through the gate into the reserve, I need an annual Wild Card that costs me more than a ten-year US visa, plus an extra card for my bicycle, and extra for snorkelling or fishing or staying overnight. When I applied for my Wild Card, I was also invited to marry a staffer of South African National Parks (SANParks), since the system had no variable for a solo parent with children. The staff member on the line from Pretoria suggested that I put in the identity number of the desk attendant under "spouse." I declined the offer of nuptials, however generous, so according to SANParks records, I'm married to my sister.

But I'm getting away from my story, and in any case, today the Wild Card has been forgotten at home, and I'm at Cape Point with my Cannondale that leaps forward like a Lamborghini when I put pedal to metal. Notwithstanding my offer of every identity card that I have in my possession, the only visa that SANParks will accept is my Visa credit card. The morning sun dazzles the Indian Ocean while my card and the card machine chatter away about my bank balance. A slip prints, and I sign. The woman at the toll till calls over my shoulder to her colleague behind me: "The Russians are here." Her tone is flat. The same words would have scrambled the South African Navy in Simonstown twenty years ago, but today it is just business. Black Mercs, Audis, BMWs sweep past the official roadway via a side entrance, gratis: no Wild Cards, visas, or Visa cards needed. They are here on BRICS business, no doubt: to negotiate for nature in the form of uranium, methane, undersea oil and gas, elsewhere in South Africa, for the Brazil–Russia–India–China–South Africa alliance. It must have been their day out to come and see where the two oceans meet, take in a bit of fenced-off nature—something different from discussions about GDP, nuclear power, and the BRICS Bank.

Their convoy leaves, and my cycling companion and I work our way around the hill in the still morning air, along the miles of roadway that is mercifully tour-bus-free this early on a Saturday morning. At the end of the road there's the Cape Point lighthouse and the blessed coffee shop. We lean our bikes on a bronze baboon statue as the first tour bus comes in with a whoosh of brakes. A clutch of Germans is ushered in by a tour guide with bottle-red hair, a gold necklace, and a sunbed tan. Heeled in Nike, crowned in Ray-Bans, and hung with Nikon, the visitors wear the dust-free, sweat-proof raiments of the duty-free perfumed classes—khaki here, apricot there, a dash of white and gold; hints of leopard; a whisper of zebra. They hover like bumblebees around their sushi and champagne when out of nowhere a baboon with a baby dangling from her belly darts in and makes off with a fistful of sugar sachets. Mayhem erupts. With brooms and mops, the staff charge the German line. Mother and baby hop over the electric fence. A ranger with popping buttons puffs up the koppie (small hill) to give chase. Amid the general hilarity re Close Encounter with Baboons, the cappuccino sippers open conversations across the customs attending table borders. A South African at the table next to me says hi. I learn he is a helicopter pilot who exports agricultural materials to India. He and his brother bought a farm in the province of Mpumalanga near the Kruger National Park three years ago, but they're still waiting for their licence to quarry coal. "The problem is not the extraction," he says. "It's what comes after. You have to restore everything."

As I'm cycling home, there's not much to see—the tour buses are out, so the animals are not—but beyond the nature reserve fence there are baboon monitors in the streets of Scarborough, their paintball guns covered. Dressed in bright yellow traffic vests atop bush-green uniforms, they're the wildlife riot police, aka Human Wildlife Solutions.

I'm curious. When I arrive home, I look up their website and find in their annual report the names of the local baboon troops: the Waterfall troop, the Misty Cliffs troop, the Da Gama troop, the Groot Olifantsbos troop. The map of troop turf backs onto Da Gama Park, Red Hill shack settlement, Simonstown, and Smitswinkel Bay; their land goes into Cape Point, where there are another four troops, touching the residential areas called Scarborough, Misty Cliffs, Ocean View, Masiphumelele, Capri. I'm intrigued, and scope the area out on Google Earth. A wider range of South African publics is hard to imagine along any one road. How do different ideas about baboons and other creatures play out in everyday life, I wonder: do some neighbourhoods love the wildlife in the region? Is there a bushmeat trade? Are children safe from the rangers' paintballs? What about baby baboons and juveniles? I pore over Google Earth, wondering what baboon troops and human neighbours think of one another across the edges of the city and the wild.

A few days later, I'm back in a car to drive the circle of roads here that ring the south peninsula section of Table Mountain National Park, starting at Da Gama Park, with its abandoned military buildings and its ship-shattering cannon pointing out over Simonstown. Its concrete fence posts are slowly splitting open as the steel inside rusts in a slow-motion argument between chemistry and property. The top road leads over into Welcome Glen, where hard times announce themselves in patches of rust and you can buy sacred crystals at bargain prices from the Scratch Patch, where agates and quartzes are tumbled and polished and sometimes dyed turquoise. Next door is the old Marine Oil Refinery—bulldozed and awaiting a mall, but still bearing the name that was a polite term for the business of boiling down southern right whales. Around the bend and over the hill is Capri, home to middle classes, with wind-shredded exotic palms in streets with names like "Bermuda Way." Across the road is Masiphumelele, where over the past few years, a child in my son's class has lost his home three times in shack fires.

Some weeks later I join a hike, walking Cape Point to Kommetjie for two days, with a group of researchers who are there to think about Table Mountain and its many natures.

Day 1: I'm astonished at how hard it is to walk on the mountain, clambering over rocks. My gear is perfect: a light pack, great boots. The problem is in my centre. I feel like a Picasso painting. I'm used to roads, pavements, stairs, where I don't have to think about my feet. To walk here, I need to feel my core; but I can't—I am walking feet topped by thinking head, fending off images of an ice-cream cone about to lose its scoop. Most of my energy goes to balancing; trying to feel that body core that has gone AWOL after twelve years of child-rearing, a divorce, and an academic day-and-night job.

Day 2: The wind has moved in. Great gusts of icy south-easterly winds blow up from the Antarctic. My backpack is like a sail. I bob around the mountain trail like an insect on a car aerial. My legs are sore, and I'm the slowpoke at the back. Keeping going is the focus. A rhythm finally settles in, from my feet to my being: a refrain that keeps me walking. It's a song—a rap—that rises from nowhere, but I can feel it in my belly, and, most important, I can walk it. Greet—the earth—with e-very footfall. Greet—the earth—with e-very footfall. Greet—the earth—with e-very footfall. Greetings become caresses—gratitude for the gift of a secure step. I walk more gently; wondering what would be different if greeting the earth with every footfall was how I lived all the time . . . or perhaps if that was how everyone lived. Still focused on balancing and not slip-sliding away, I clutch onto the mountain with my feet the way a toddler clutches the side of a cot. The earth owes me nothing. I owe it everything.

The trail takes us past the back of Ocean View, home to apartheid-displaced fishers and their families, next to a farm that used to feed the sailors who arrived in Simonstown in the 1700s. It's warmer now. The sun is higher, and west of the ridge, the southeaster no longer rips. The view across Ocean View, Noordhoek, and Hout Bay is a tiny vista of the immensity of humans being together in a city whose edges form a wild space like no other. Multiple publics; multiple species; living despite the earth, despite each other, all navigating high walls, electric fences, security gates, and security systems. Here on the Cape Peninsula—my home for thirteen years—earth still gives life to all, even if our electricity comes from the sun's energy stored in the geological era called the Carboniferous, before the Jurassic, via coal quarried from farmlands in Mpumalanga, making South Africans among the worst per capita polluters on the planet. The Russian discussions on our energy futures are based on rocks that date back to the days when Africa was part of Pangea the supercontinent, and the Karoo was at the South Pole. Their business plan appears to have been drawn up despite warnings by earth scientists and climatologists that fossil fuels and nuclear radiation have changed the planet enough to warrant naming our time a new geological era.

The earth scientists call it the Anthropocene, a time when "global human"—Anthropos—has changed the earth's system of energy and chemical flows. They are wrong, of course: it is not universal humanity that has done this, but the societies caught up in a globalised economic system based on natural resource extraction and capital accumulation. My colleagues in the social sciences and humanities prefer the term "Capitalocene" for that reason. The irony! Russians and liberated South Africans are advancing the Capitalocene: negotiating the extraction of uranium despite the fragile economy, despite our fragile ecology. Political time—the five-year election cycle—is now also geological time, a period that changes the planet, forever; leaves a stratigraphy in the rocks, in the ice shelves, on the sea levels, on species that live or die. Law has a geological effect. So does philosophy. The social contract that undergirds modern democracies globally has produced a new age of extinctions: the loss of 53 percent of animal species since 1970, even in the age of conservation fences and national parks. Perhaps future archaeologists will read ours as the Age of the Angry Earth: a time of failed fences on an angry planet; a time of social contracts and constitutions that are cutting off from the tree of life the branch on which humans are living with barely a thought for negotiations over the future of our multispecies companions and our geological soulmates—rocks, lakes, atmospheres, oceans—in our humans-only parliaments.

What would it take to negotiate a truce with the earth, in the South Africa that entered global history because here at the Cape of Storms was a mountain that yielded springs of fresh water all year long?

Do we need the idea of the wild, of green, to save the planet?

Negotiating a truce with planetary systems and local ecologies has failed. The ideas of our times—environment, Wild Cards, ecosystem services—have not provided more than a few ecological zones amid a permanent war on ecology. And those zones are overwhelmingly preserves of elites: whites like myself who own Cannondale bicycles and would one day like to take the kids camping there, in a privately owned SUV.

Cycling around the peninsula, weekend after weekend, taught me that what I have been taught to see, and what I expect to see, and what I have learned to name and connect, did not give me the tools to "think" the connections that my bicycle was making, slow spoke by slow spoke. Pedalling in the early morning crisp air out on the peninsula, from the shanty settlements at Masiphumelele and Ocean View to the extreme wealth at Misty Cliffs, and across regional histories and geological times and municipal elections and cups of coffee, was a weekly provocation for about a year: surely, it seemed to dawn on me, there was another way of thinking; another way

of working together; another way of living with the earth . . . another way of "thinking Cape Town."

The available options for thinking about the environment seemed to be these: an impossible romanticism, evident in so many greenie projects, where nature is paradise; or a modernist idyll in which Nature is where Natives come from, and They Have Nature But We Do Not (unless we have that SUV). Paradises Lost. Paradises Found. Paradises built with Parking Lots outside Cultural Villages in which humans play, for a fee, the-culture-of-humans-in-nature. A sign in the change-room of the outdoor sports shop: "Our company provides for the outdoor market and the outdoor aspirational market." Could living with Nature be not Extreme Sport or Wild Culture or Aspirational Market, but the Home version? The Greek word *oikos*, for "household," gives us the words "ecology," "economy," and "ecumene"—being together. Can we restore the planetary household *oikos*: in which earth, soil, species are together ecology, economy, and ecumene? Might our en-vironment become also our in-vironment, in which we recognise the geology that forms our bones and our legal system; our households and our food supply chain? Why is it so hard for us to imagine that future archaeologists will see in our bones the Big Farmer and Big Pharma that fed us the preservatives and pesticides and persistent organic pollutants that made us as sick as our soils?

Thinking of nature as something that belongs in a reserve is an idea that belongs in a museum. Notwithstanding all the environmental science we have, we're lost: we don't know where we are. We nature-lovers don't know how to live in the "nature-free" world of commodities that we've made on our planet.

When you're lost, you retrace your steps, as best you can. Go back to places you've seen before; exploring the routes in and through them again. Ask: How did we get here? What pasts are present, and what futures are forming? What connections exist that I didn't see before?

Contorted bodies. Pain etched in faces. Headless girls bending over backward, breasts to the sky. Mothers conjoined to babies. Endless images of entangled selves. Bizarre stone versions of the big beasts—elephant, buffalo, lion, giraffe, zebra, a massive hippo with shark teeth. Endless whale tails. I'm back on the road to Cape Point, in a car this time. I stopped at the stone carvings next to a muddy tour bus stop—always made a mental note to park and look. Today's the day. Wandered through them. They're higher than doors, or small as feet. I look for something that speaks of a connection with the world. I find personhood in pain, alongside bizarre Afro-kitsch versions of wild beasts incarnated in soapstone. The agonies of Frantz Fanon; of Aimé

Césaire's poetry; of traumatised selves; the pornography of Europe's gaze at Africa, cast in stone. I feel ill. Note to self: *Process this later*. A refugee amid scattered body parts turned to stone, I flee to the shop next door—Red Rock Tribal Art—and, from its name, expect a version of the cultural village. But I am surprised, meeting in it an owner and traveller who has an eye for artists whose representations speak of humanity | animality | earth that I recognise; that I could hope for.

Is it the white South African in me that feels such relief at finding a connection to nature that I can relate to? Is the pangolin that I buy, in the end, a romantic naïveté? I don't know anymore. Millipedes, carved chameleons, papier-mâché springbok heads designed to provoke an ironic guffaw at white hunters' fetish for stuffed heads on walls. Amid the Asante stools and kente cloths, a stone pond with algae and tadpoles and gorgeous succulents, I still feel ill. I'm staggering at the assault of trauma in the roadside soapstone. But the artists' nature assuages me, calms me. Restores my reality. I would sob with relief, if I could. But it wouldn't be normal, so I don't.

Shop owner Jules and I talk for a long time, about everyday things, about the environmental Greens, real and imagined, of Scarborough, about living ecologically. "The soil is our blood," she says. "I don't understand people who use industrial chemicals to clean their homes." My innards stop gasping. I take some pictures; take my leave. Go up to the restaurant next door—there's a guitarist whose music I love playing on Friday. I nod, I smile, I take pictures: landscapes with farmhouses, landscapes with shacks, landscapes with shacks and sea.

I drive up to the military base that's now the Table Mountain National Park Marine Protected Area Signals Division, behind tangled bursts of barbed wire that I step over to take pictures of the "Stop Crime" signboard in the dust. I photograph and photograph and photograph, taking 360-degree shots on a rock plinth, and stagger off at the last one. Across the road, I drive the short left down to Brooklands. A glade of blue agapanthus catches my eye. They're not indigenous here; must surely have been part of the old settlement. I see no house nearby, though, nothing to suggest this was once a garden. Carry on slowly down the perfectly tarred road, around a dad with four novice skateboarders age eight and up. Down to the Brooklands Water Scheme, and take the gravel road below the dam wall as far as I dare. U-turn, gingerly, a seven-point turn. Back down the tarred road, the blue catches my eye. Stop. Park. Walk. Carefully pick my way through the lawn grass that has gone wild and become mountainside undergrowth, checking for puff adder diamondbacks. Wouldn't want to get bitten here—no one would find me for a week. A few footfalls take me to plinths of concrete. They're made of broken bricks. One of them has bathroom tiles on it: white, with a royal navy trim that matches

the grove of agapanthus. They're gorgeous. It's mid-December, and next year they will be remembered by those who once lived here, in Brooklands, who suffered the race-based forced removals of the 1970s, and who, *Groundup* magazine tells me, still meet here once a year on Heritage Day.[1]

Months later, after the statue of Cecil John Rhodes has been removed from the campus where I work, and I have read and heard black students speaking of their struggles with coloniality in the curriculum and in the everyday, I begin to understand the pain in the sculptures for tourists on safari who will put down money for a white gaze carved in ebony, not ivory.

The Red Hill drive down is steep, a series of switchbacks that start at the camo-painted cannon near the entrance to Da Gama Park. It overlooks Simonstown naval harbour, where our national debt shudders in the waves. A cyclist has stopped, gasping at the last hairpin bend, standing on the tar astride his bike, leaning on his handlebars. He's too exhausted to look at me, or take in the "amper daar" ("almost there") that I want to offer him. I drive down slowly, looking for the faded old "bokkie" sign that warns against mountain fires. It's near the bottom, angled at those coming up, and covered with graffiti—but you can still see the Disney Bambi eyes in front of a mountain blaze, with the legend "Look What You've Done!" It's an accusation: *You're Guilty, Humanity*. It trumpets the attitude of those who believe that to save Table Mountain National Park's nature, we need to Keep All Non-paying Humans Out.

It's ironic, I think—or is it?—that the naval harbour below is a space permanently ready for war. The war in the harbour would be against foreigners in the name of the nation's people; but the war on the mountain is against non-paying humans in the name of the nation's nature, and what would have been a colonial war over regional resources two hundred years ago (even thirty years ago) is now a polite negotiation over finance managed by the people we elected to ensure liberation. Within this way of thinking, the people who throw up stumbling blocks are "unpatriotic." Ask the people of Xolobeni and Lutzville, who have been battling an Australian mining company which wants to mine their titanium-rich sands. Surely that's a version of civil war, in which government opposes its own people who want to live in their piece of the planet, and not off it?

Our national debt bobbing in the waves—the Corvettes and submarines—is core to the arms deal that crippled South Africa's polity in 1996, choking a newborn democracy with corruption: the birth (berth!) of "state capture" by corporate multinationals willing to grease palms. When I'd been at Navy Day with my sons, one of the vessels was already being used for spare

parts—its name was plastered all over the equipment on the operations deck of its sister ship.

The cost of these vessels is responsible for the impoverishment of the naval dock as a whole: roads are in disrepair; barbed-wire fences are falling down. There's the palpable absence of a coast guard, in favour of a military that will fight imaginary wars that will make politicians great again, even though in 2012 South Africa's Exclusive Economic Zone was signed into international maritime law, giving the country exclusive access to the ocean's life and mineral resources for two hundred kilometres out to sea, along all three thousand kilometres of our coastline. As of that moment, South Africa had more marine area than land, but it could be patrolled only by a handful of multibillion-rand vessels of war that the navy could only send to sea for a few weeks in some financial years, according to submissions made to the corruption-investigating Arms Procurement Commission.[2] They are not the naval assets we need—and we can't afford their highly specialised maintenance.

The signs of an under-resourced everyday in the navy are all round in the Table Mountain National Park Signals Division, even in the peeling sign that greets me outside a fragile building on the mountaintop naval base. I photograph away, at the abandoned sentry post. No one stops me or asks any questions. I hear footsteps: a woman in a park ranger's uniform trudges across the disintegrating tarmac from one building to another. Her arm is strapped in a wrist guard. The occupational hazard in Simonstown's naval base in the electronics era is not going overboard, but going keyboard. The knowledge economy is a virtual world, and bodies don't do well in it.

Down at the docks, leisure yachts almost touch sides with the Corvettes. At the restaurant near Da Gama Park, there's a sign bearing information about dolphins and otters. A bit further on, some men fishing for supper. A diving shop. A kayak shop. I stop to start writing this at Just Sushi, overlooking the harbour where whale-watching charters dock and tuna charters come in to weigh their catches at the three-metre-high fish hoist, and the Salty Sea Dog makes the best hake and chips in the world.

In the weeks that follow, I see that uneasy alliance between the South African Defence Force and the South African nature conservationists mirrored in rhino management. The November 2014 cover of *Pop Mech*—the magazine more formally known as *Popular Mechanics*—shows a rhino made of the parts of a tank for a military hardware expo. A bumper sticker on a white Mercedes-Benz at my local petrol station in Newlands announces, "Save the rhino, hunt a poacher." The smugness of it makes even me—generally benign—want to crack the bumper. In what world do they live that makes it okay to speak of hunting people? Do they not know the same words were

Intro.1 | Bumper sticker, Newlands, Cape Town, 2016. Photo: Lesley Green.

used in the Cape only 125 years before, and one consequence was the genocide of the San? Can they not see that their "green" is the new white? That people who once lived off the land and whose stories were full of accounts of living with animals and learning from them were forced off the land in a time when nature reserves were set up along with native reserves? And that the high-budget game lodge that sponsored the sticker—Palala—is a hunting lodge targeting wealthy professionals? How has it been possible that conservation has come not only to speak of hunting people without a blink, but to turn the phrase into a feel-good "that's-who-I-am-too" bumper sticker?

Violent conservation is not unique to South Africa. Rosaleen Duffy notes:

> Conservationists increasingly talk in terms of a "war" to save species. International campaigns present a specific image: that parks agencies and conservation NGOs are engaged in a continual battle to protect wildlife from armies of highly organized criminal poachers who are financially motivated. The war to save biodiversity is presented as a legitimate war

> to save critically endangered species such as rhinos, tigers, gorillas and elephants. This is a significant shift in approach since the late 1990s, when community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) and participatory techniques were at their peak. Since the early 2000s there has been a . . . renewed interest in fortress conservation models to protect wildlife, including by military means.[3]

On the internet, "white green violence" is not hard to find. The new White Man's Burden—saving African nature from Africans—is stark in the work of VETPAW, aka Veterans Protecting African Wildlife, an NGO in which US military veterans get to put their theatre-of-war experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan to use on the African continent to protect African wildlife. It has set up "missions" in Kenya and South Africa. Many of the photos on its Facebook page would be at home in *Hustler* magazine, as their organisational diplomat is so often shot in a bikini and camo fatigues, draped in rifle-bullet necklaces. The television version is probably not far off.

What is the Black Man's Burden? For Joel Netshitenze, writing in 2016,

> Blackness cannot be defined by howls of pain in the face of a stubborn and all-encompassing racism. As during the struggle against apartheid colonialism, it should define its mission as being to resist, to persuade, to teach, to cajole and to lead in the name of an all-embracing humanity. . . . Blackness's "attitude of mind and way of life," to paraphrase the proponents of Black Consciousness, should turn grievance into strategy and action. The Black man's burden in today's South Africa should find expression in deliberate self-definition and self-assertion, in pursuit of excellence and acting as a force of example on what it means to be human and humane. Core to such an approach should be an ideal higher than pursuit of equality with whites. It should be about a new civilisation, "thoroughly spiritual and humanistic," which takes "its place . . . with other great human syntheses," "giving the world a more human face," to quote Seme, Luthuli and Biko, respectively.[4] Blackness should position itself as an integral and equal part of humanity, in dogged pursuit of excellence on a global scale.

Netshitenze's piece was greeted with outrage and dismissal by the student protesters whom he was addressing. His words were cerebral. When #Fallist students spoke or wrote, in 2015, they wrote of pain.

Where Kommetjie Road meets Slangkop Drive lies Ocean View: a place of forced removals, fisheries activism, and lobster poaching, whose trash was

buried in the sand dunes up until the 1980s at a place known to surfers as the "Crayfish Factory." Across from Ocean View is Imhoff's Gift, the old farm that grew sailors' food, where now the monied can ride a camel, order another cappuccino, or feed peacocks. A horse farm has put up signs warning riders out on Long Beach to beware of the muggers in the sand dunes.

Closer to the Atlantic shoreline is Kommetjie: a place of surfers and fish traps from the earliest human settlements. The remains of some of them lie in boxes in the back stacks of the Iziko Museum, taken from caves and shelters all along the peninsula, where seashells can be found above the highest sea levels known in our lifetimes. Theirs is the legacy of an earlier, warmer era, and if archaeologists are correct, the perlemoen (abalone) they ate changed humans' evolutionary destiny.[5] Thirty killer whales beached near here a few summers ago, a little north of the Soetwater ("sweet water") campsite, where a few winters later, Nigerians and Somali refugees fleeing Cape Town's xenophobia were beached in tents at the sea's edge.

The road passes Misty Cliffs, where the sea mist hangs thick in the air all day; only sometimes burned off when the sun shows over the hills at eleven in the morning. Then there's Scarborough: where Scarborough Keepers is the name of the neighbourhood watch, and their warning board is not the usual suburban crosshairs of a gunsight or a crusader's sword and shield, but a circle of hand-holding humans.

I'm back on my bike, heading to Simonstown. It's midsummer. There's a shortcut over Red Hill at the informal settlement—shacks—and just past it there's that left turn to reach Brooklands, where dune moles excavate shards of porcelain teacups. The road curves around back to Da Gama Park, where 1970s prefab houses with Vibracrete walls and yellowing grass verges are interrupted by the same dune moles.

The hill above Simonstown is steep: grasses, rocks, and ferns amid shards of brown beer bottles and the occasional blue government-issue condom wrapper. A bit further to the left, there's a headland, and in its crevasse is a waterfall: home of the Waterfall baboon troop. The troop used to nest there, a Zimbabwean economic exile once told me. He makes a living selling teak fruit bowls made from Zimbabwean forest trees to the tourists passing the gates of Cape Point. Over the years of cycling here I've gotten to know his yellow bakkie, as small trucks are known in South Africa. One day I asked for him, and was led to a bush-green steel chest. Someone called his name and lifted the lid, and he climbed out, rubbing his eyes, extending his hand in greeting: "Hi, I'm Austin." He'd lived in the shacks on Red Hill since 1999. The baboons were terrible, he had said when I'd asked: they tore apart chickens, raided vegetable patches, trashed groceries. He said they were terrorising

the Red Hill shacks, ever since Nature Conservation cut down the Australian eucalyptus trees where they used to nest, to make way for indigenous vegetation. The point is a contested one, I learned later from baboon observers, since the troop had several sleep sites. Why was it, I wondered, that conservation officials were the target of this shack dweller's ire?

We chatted some more, then I cycled on, across the peninsula toward Scarborough. The baboon monitors of Human Wildlife Solutions are like bush fire-fighters holding a line above the vineyard. Or riot police. Most of the humans here welcome the monitors. Do the wildlife?

That December I spend a few weeks living in Scarborough, to try to get a feel for life with fence-crossing baboons. On Tuesdays the wheelie bins are out for refuse collection. "The baboons are back," sings out a child to her mother when she sees one. I follow her gaze to find the monitor, and then follow his stare up the road. There's a young baboon greedily tearing apart a Pick n Pay bag that peeps out of a shattered rubbish bin, its locks still intact. "You just can't get ahead of them," my landlord tells me. "First we put locks on the bins. Then the baboons learned to knock the bins over to pop the lids off. So everyone laid their bins on their sides, but the baboons have learned that if they jump on them long enough they split open. We just can't win."

As I continue on foot, my route takes me into the top road at Scarborough. "They've gone that way, behind the house," calls a woman in a lemon chiffon dressing-gown from her balcony to the baboon monitor wearing bush khaki. If she had curlers, it would complete the picture. The monitor moves up the slopes, around the rocks, over a building site; his paintball gun is covered with cloth so as not to upset their opponents here, who have listed on their Facebook page the names and photographs of the terminated *Papio ursinus.*

Finding a language in which to think and speak about "nature," "green," and "environment," outside of the already written and the already said, is like riding a bicycle through the bush instead of taking the road. A road would be easier—but tarred ways only take you to what has already been mapped. When you have already ridden down the written-down and not found a way to answer the questions you have, you navigate the slow stuff, hoping that there might be a different insight; different ways of seeing how the earth relates to this age of the geological effects of humans that geologists call the Anthropocene, in this strange and beautiful peninsula at the Cape of

Good Hope. When you are navigating an unthought trail, there are no auto-completes for words or thoughts.

Ours is a difficult moment in a difficult season. Telling a different story can begin, perhaps, from a self that has the courage to make—to scope—its land and sea and history in terms different to those with which we were raised. The question this book seeks to address is not how "we ought to do more" for the environment, but rather as an academic, a sixth-generation white South African, and a mother of two, how to find a way into ecological situations more thoughtfully than the auto-completes allow.

How to be more present to expunged pasts? How to imagine what others have felt in these places in other times, in other disciplines, as other species, as the earth itself? What is it to be present at the massive ecological destruction of our times, amid the pressing sense of the failure of "scientific nature" to find a voice in South African political life that can speak in voices other than the tones of "whiteliness" (to use Marilyn Frye's term): the expert, the judge, the martyr?[6] How to feel and think, and hold on to relationships that matter in a time of neoliberalism where all relations that matter in "the economy" have been translated into dollar values for "the market," while the rest have become invisible? How to enter into the life of the earth with those who share my space in this city, from my 1856 house that was built as a shop with the mountain's rocks and wood and clay to sell beer made from the mountain streams, six years before the last Cape Town lion was shot a mile away in 1862?

Sixteen decades later, that Westvoord Farm Shop that is now my home has been nipped and tucked by successive sell-offs into a suburban plot of 260 or so square metres, and the land that once pastured Khoe cattle, and then those of Van Riebeeck's and Rhodes's neighbours, now schools teenagers at Westerford High School. The ecologies of the city are fiercely contested: water, baboons, lobsters, streams, sanitation, air quality, alien plants, the daily discharge of the city's sewage into the ocean. Yet the night camera traps set up by my colleagues in biological sciences have yielded pictures of African genet cats prowling in the stream bed off Lemon Lane a few blocks away, along with Cape clawless otters. Radio collars on caracals find that six of them live above Rhodes Memorial, just a short walk from my house, a short left from the university, and a few hundred metres from Westbrook, the presidential mansion. And sometimes, at night, these caracals cross the M3 highway along which the good citizens of the southern suburbs crawl into work in their cars by the hundred thousand in the mornings and then home again in the evenings, perhaps in time to get their dogs and their Wild Cards, to go for a walk on the mountain's forested slopes.

Writing a book such as this began with a glimpse of a set of things that need rethinking together. That glimpse came as I cycled around the Cape Peninsula, encountering not only things and places known and protected by the environmental sciences, but also the sense that those things themselves—national parks, marine protected areas, baboon troops, streams, lobsters, fishers' struggles, urban farms—were also haunted. They had an existence in science and in environmental work; they also had another mode of existence that was unseen and unremarked. What's invisible are the stories in which they were once embedded in sets of relations, before they were reduced to words and objects, and the stories of their relations forgotten. The sense that concepts, in the world of natural science and environmentalism, are haunted is captured by Jacques Derrida when he plays with the word "ontologies"—the assumptions about what exists—and comes up with "hauntologies." Over time I began to get a sense that by understanding how environments became ghosted by their forgotten aspects, it was possible to find the place where some existences got lost, where they lost their ontological moorings, so to speak. In that moment, environmentalism became part of the era of expulsions, and of extractions driven by expulsions, and of the struggles against extinction in spaces of extraction.

How do you explain "ontologies" to a naturalist who thinks that his or her idea of "nature" is what is "just there," without thinking about how that idea of nature or environment came to be?

When I was a teenager, I was lost in a world of fundamentalism: the world of the incontrovertible Word, where the Word was God, and the Bible was literally true. It took me a long time to think my way out of that, and in consequence I'm somewhat allergic—or at least hypersensitive—to ways of making the world as if that way of world-making is the only way to make a world (or even worse, as if it is the only world).

Enter "Natural Science," stage right: a way of world-making with Things, as if no human mediations of those things have occurred. A piece of charcoal, for example, might be soil on a farm, or dirt in an office, but gold in a carbon-dating laboratory. It all depends on the relationships and technologies in which the charcoal is situated. I'm a great fan of science, but I'm not a fan of the political authority that "Science" (with a capital *S*) takes when it presents its findings in politics the same way as the Discovery Channel presents them on TV: uncontestable, heroic journeys into "the" singular and transcendent truth. I think the best scientists I have worked with are those who know science as a space of permanent doubt, permanent questioning

and self-questioning, and who are open to rethinking their own situatedness and ontologies.

I was privileged to do some of that kind of work with chemist David Gammon and botanist Timm Hoffmann, in dialogue with anthropologist Joshua Cohen, exploring how healers in Namaqualand approach plant medicine, and how that differs from modernist approaches to medicine which have trained us to seek out molecules of warfare: antifungals, antibiotics, antivirals, anti-inflammatories, antihelminthics. At the end of that project (described in chapter 3), Cohen had enough material to argue that healers were primarily looking for plants that restored "krag," or energy/vitality/well-being. That didn't mean that healers were not using plants as anti-inflammatories or antihelminthics, but it did mean that it was wrong to reduce what they did to what we had always assumed about how plant medicine worked.

That's ontology, right there: looking at how you look; what you name; what matters to you. These are the "things" that science draws attention to in political life. But when a scientist or a profession starts to believe that their way of knowing something is the only existence that that thing has, that scientist is at risk of missing what might matter very much to others, or the relations that are really important to that thing.

"Colonisation is thingification," wrote Aimé Césaire, one of the founders of postcolonial thought.[7] For Césaire, the only way to think in a world that had been stupefied by colonial taxonomies and techniques of naming natural and human resources, and in so doing extracting them from their local relationships, was to turn to the surreal. Neither religious nor scientific words worked for him. Poetry was for him what bicycle riding was for me: a way of slowing down, questioning the connections that had been taught, and erased, and reduced to things. And making different connections.

Finding a place from which to reconnect scientific ontology with its hauntologies is the work of this book, because we can no longer reduce the ex-es of our time—extinctions, expulsions, extractions, existence—to individual problems to be addressed apart from one another. This book is in part a rebellion against the authoritarian claim to transcendent knowledge that is contained within many expressions of environmental sciences, environmental management, and environmental activism. In particular, it is a rebellion against the way in which "scientistic" approaches, in South Africa, have come to serve as an authorising space for white authority. Where "science" is understood to offer the ultimate truth about "nature," and politics is understood to be the opposite of science (and therefore parliamentary debate is to be confined to society, economy, and culture), a partial connection with racialised authority (always denied in the name of objectivity) has been

inevitable.[8] Yet the South African scientific community has (with very few exceptions) been unwilling to acknowledge, much less explore, its connections to the racialised history of claims to authority in this country.

This book is therefore an attempt to reclaim the space of critical enquiry in the sciences of South African environmentalism, navigating a path that welcomes and celebrates scientific enquiry, scientific achievements, and integrative thinking, and questions scientific reductionism and transcendence, and associated forms of environmental authoritarianism.

It is difficult to cut such a path at a time when multiple assaults on science are part of political, legal, and corporate life—and indeed in the social sciences too, in endless claims that science is a matter of identity politics. This book, chapter by chapter, proposes a "resituating" of the "critical zone" as one that embraces the encounter of humans, technologies, and modes of doing politics, with this planet's planes of existence in rock, water, and life. That "critical zone"—itself a term borrowed from soil scientists who are thinking integratively—is vital to the future of sciences, politics, and universities. If environmental science and management are to mobilise an environmental public in South Africa, they need a different approach.

The writing of this book began on my bicycle, trying to process the dis-ease I felt traversing nature and city, wealth and poverty, navy and conservation. As the idea of writing a book on several different Western Cape environmental struggles evolved, it became more and more apparent that it was not possible to think about nature without attending to the nature that people constitute, and our bodily entanglements with the places in which we live and have our being. For that reason, the opening chapters offer historical and contemporary studies of two places—Table Mountain and the Karoo. As those studies took form, I realised that I was seeing the changing relations of rock, water, and life in South African history—and that tracing these was a way to challenge the illusion that nature and society are separate. The knowledge of them, and their governance, neither could nor should be pursued separately.

With the arrival at the Cape of the mercantile capitalism of seventeenth-century Europe and its imposition of property ownership by military means, capitalism began to insert itself into the web of life (to borrow Jason Moore's phrase),[9] changing the relation of Table Mountain's rock with the Cape Town water supply. This study forms chapter 1: a tale of property ownership made possible by the new Cartesian scientific cosmos of property measurement and mapping, and the closure of lands and water held in a commons.

Chapter 2 traces the Cape colonists' relationship with water over the next three hundred years, during which the dry inland Karoo region became a site of struggles over who got to access water and live, amid the rise of windmills in the late 1800s, accomplishing in South Africa almost exactly what was happening in the United States at the same time: the defeat of indigenous people whose knowledge of water points in dry lands had made the difference between life and death. The hopeless struggle of the !Xam against the commercial extraction of aquifer water for sheep farming that windmills made possible is paralleled now in the almost hopeless struggle of sheep farmers against the almost inevitable rise of the fracking derrick that will bleed gas from stone. The chapter traces the insertion of capitalism into the relation between water and life in the Karoo. As in chapter 1, chapter 2 argues for a continuity of colonial forms of relation into the neoliberal present: posing the challenge that if science is to be genuinely decolonial, it needs to reclaim the web of life from financialised relationships.

Part I, "Pasts Present," sets out the multiple natures (that is, multiple accounts of the world) that constitute contemporary political life in South Africa. *These are part of the conditions creating climate crisis in the wake of settler colonialism and modernity, globally*. I've aimed to work with the ways in which histories of water, land, and mountain continue into current struggles over water and land and fracking, asking what other ways there are to think about "the nature" of the relations among rock, water, and life in Cape Town and the Karoo. Both chapters evidence the larger argument that there is not one single version of "environment"—in these cases, Table Mountain or Karoo—rather, how something is understood to be "natural" or "environmental" is an effect of the ecopolitical relations of a historical moment.

Part II—"Present Futures"—explores current struggles over nature, in student decolonial activism and the possibility of rethinking the debate currently figured as indigenous knowledge versus science via studies of plant medicine in Namaqualand. Thinking about environmentalism in relation to land struggles, chapter 4 travels through settler-colonial history in the Eastern Cape and returns to the Cape Town region with attention to current struggles over land restitution and soils, with particular attention to the struggle between developers and farmers over the Philippi Horticultural Area east of the city.

Part III—"Futures Imperfect"—includes a critique of patriarchal primatology by way of a focus on the management of Cape baboons in chapter 5. In chapter 6, I offer an integrated exploration of the ecological regime shift in the Cape's kelp forests, from migrating lobsters to harmful algal blooms and the extinction risks faced by abalone, before focusing on fishers' struggles

and fisheries management strategies, and the form of environmental science and activism developed by fishers and colleagues in the Abalobi project.

The coda serves as a conclusion, reviewing the studies to suggest approaches to integrated scholarship that can contest the kinds of captured environmental science that dominate current environmental governance in the Western Cape, the province I call home, and the region in which all of these studies are rooted.

In working toward an alternative way of understanding ecology, perhaps most important was that cycling around the peninsula on weekends, and then writing these chapters about different environmentalisms during the weeks, entailed a birth to presence:[10] the kind of presence that is neither purely subjective in a world of feelings and impressions, nor strictly objective in the sense that it pursues established concepts and categories. As I was seeking a line of flight from ideas that are dominant because they dominate every moment of ecological imagining, the approach that I found most useful was to follow connections that seemed tangential. By working around received ideas rather than through them, it became possible to trace not only the evident forms, but the gaps between them—as my friend and fine-art colleague Virginia MacKenny had taught me to do in drawing: sometimes it is helpful to work with the spaces between things, not just the thing itself.

"Thinking athwart" a situation, to borrow the words Elspeth Probyn uses to reimagine seafood sustainability,[11] makes it possible to think outside of the available vessels: concepts that are already named and their relationships prefigured. To think athwart an established concept may seem to some to choose a state of drift. Yet conceptual drift can be a lifeboat where inherited concepts themselves are sinking vessels. Where climate-smart agriculture, for example, brooks no criticism of its romance with commercial agriculture's genetically modified (GM) seeds, which are sold to policy-makers as drought resistant, they are not paying attention to a damaged vessel. Under proposed seed laws designed to suit GM-seed manufacturers, farmers who share seeds will be criminalised, as will those onto whose land GM plant pollen blows. The gift economy of seeds, so central to African rural society, would be outlawed. Corporate seeds will be stripped of their ability to reproduce, and seeds may render soil unable to be used by any non-GM seeds. Escape is needed from the conceptual apparatus that makes such an approach appear economically viable, scientifically objective, and technically efficient. What is "subjective" and "objective" in such an argument is not a form of world-making I can share: I cannot accept that these proposed climate interventions

offered by seed companies are based on objective, neutral science. The claims by that form of climate-smart agriculture regarding what is true, just, and valid, and what matters, do not converge with the kind of world I wish to be part of making. To build a climate future that is just requires thinking athwart the concepts that are presented as objectively real. The need, therefore, is to question how and why something comes to be understood and accepted as "objective."

For many anticolonial thinkers, including Césaire and Édouard Glissant, the "objective reality" offered by colonial modernity was unpalatable. Concepts like "natives" and "tribes" created an ethnological version of Africa and its diasporic people that had only a distant, partial connection to the lived experience of Africans. The writings of both Glissant and Césaire decentralise the cataloguing of objects—natural resources and species—that was the focus of colonial natural science, and emphasise the poetry of knowledge and the poetics of relation as modes of knowing and making knowledge that simultaneously transform the possibilities of being.[12]

French writer Jean-Luc Nancy's work on presence-to similarly offers an alternative to the fixity of a world of received subjects and objects. His work responds to the crisis of the rise in ethnonationalisms in the early 1990s, and earlier in that century. In *The Birth to Presence*, he reaches for a philosophy of knowledge that is able to speak to more than pregiven identities and representations. Presence, to Nancy, is the encounter and re-encounter with that which has always appeared to us as "obvious." In that moment, "the obvious" is transformed—as is the observer, because self-assured identity and authenticity are tangled up with assumptions about "what is obviously real."[13] Presence is thus a way of encountering the world that involves a continuous re-forming of self—a process Nancy describes as continuous birth. The value of this approach to South Africans like myself who seek to question ways of making environmental knowledge, and to revise the inheritance of settler colonialism and the certainties and objectivities attached to "whiteliness," is immense.

Colonial and apartheid South Africa were among the more extreme and definitive experiments in modernity: the creation of the binary world of subjects (citizens) and objects (nature and natives). As a society, South Africa is built on the absence required for objectivity to exist as a mode of relation. Risking what Nancy calls presence—to a situation, its elements can touch us and affect us differently. It makes possible a profound transformation of not only what it is to know, but also what it is to be. Reaching for that presence, without the subjects and objects of modernity to generate regimes of absence and negation, is helped via ideas inherited from situations and rela-

tions other than the modernist staging of reality. Modes of presence-to landscapes articulated by Khoe and !Xam archives and Namaqualand healers, among others, offer forms of relation that are not predicated on subject and object. In and around places and landscapes where environmental questions are vexed, the coming chapters pursue their fingerprints amid the bootprints left by "authorised" knowledge.