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## Toward an Afrofuturist Landscape: A Refutation of the Deceptive Aesthetics of Spatial Violence in Wynberg, Cape Town

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### Keywords:

Race, aesthetics, architecture, landscape, buffer zones, spatial imaginary, Afrofuturism, spatial humanities, apartheid, settler-colonialism, spatial violence, white supremacy, capital, Wynberg, Cape Town, South Africa

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# Toward an Afrofuturist Landscape

*A Refutation of the Deceptive Aesthetics of Spatial Violence in Wynberg, Cape Town*

Benjamin (“Ben”) Perry Levy

## Statement of Purpose

This essay represents a continuation of work that I was fortunate enough to be able to begin while I was studying abroad at the University of Cape Town in South Africa during the spring 2022 semester. Beyond this, however, this paper represents an exploratory dive into the spatial humanities, particularly with regard to architecture, history, and landscape—an interest of mine that has developed (and which I hope to pursue more [in/ex]tensively in my graduate studies) as I have had the opportunity to learn from Professor Walter Greason, one of my mentors here at Macalester College. Throughout this work, I weave together anecdote and a broad host of theory in order to expose insidious spatial violences I saw and moved throughout during my time in South Africa, and to consider what alternative negotiations of space—which I also witnessed—refute these violences. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that this essay, as is the case with all writing, is a fundamentally collaborative project: I would not have been able to complete it if not for the support and brilliance of those who I have been fortunate enough to work with and learn from. I am indescribably grateful for my peers in the senior seminar; for my mentors at Macalester College (Professors Walter Greason and Duchess Harris; and Hana Dinku) and the University of Cape Town (Drs. Shari Daya and Natasha Vally); and for all of my family and close friends.

**Keywords:** Race, aesthetics, architecture, landscape, buffer zones, spatial imaginary, Afrofuturism, spatial humanities, apartheid, settler-colonialism, spatial violence, white supremacy, capital, Wynberg, Cape Town, South Africa

## I: Preface

At the beginning of my sophomore year at Macalester College, I made the decision to study abroad in Cape Town, South Africa after spending a great deal of time talking with my mentors (and also my parents, particularly my mother). Nearly a year and a half after I made this decision, I found myself on a plane headed to Cape Town to study at the University of Cape Town (which incidentally does not fall within the city proper, but rather in the southern suburb of Rondebosch,<sup>1</sup> on the other side of Hoerikwaggo<sup>2</sup>) in the Department of Environmental and Geographic Sciences. Before I can explore how my time in Cape Town led to the creation of this essay, I must first unpack two crucial details that molded my time there: (1) my Black identity and (2) the groups of people I traveled with for the majority of time I spent in Cape Town.

Turning to the former first, I knew before I came to South Africa—through the aforementioned conversations I had with my mother (who had traveled to the country roughly a decade prior) and mentors, and through engaging with some of the work of Trevor Noah—that I would not be seen as Black; rather, I would be racialized as “Coloured” under apartheid’s lingering cruel racial imaginary by virtue of my light(er) skin. What place, though, did I have to assert my identity as a Black person—which I know to be true within the United States’ contexts—when I was in a context that I was unfamiliar with? As my time in South Africa passed, I developed an ability (albeit one that was born out of a necessity to protect myself and my being) to assert my identity and place—an ability to assert my Blackness (and later, too, my queerness)—in defiance of the falsely-placed assumptions about my identity and place that were there because of my physical appearance. Indeed, my assertion of my identity fell in line with a lot of the histories I was engaging with around Steve Biko’s movement for Black consciousness,<sup>3</sup> and that provided some reassurance for me in how I showed up and created place for myself in relation to those who I met. Irrespective of this, though, I

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Appendix A for a map of Cape Town and its southern suburbs.

<sup>2</sup> The Khoekhoe name for “the Mountain in the Sea,” otherwise known as Table Mountain.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Biko (murdered by the South African government in 1977) was a revolutionary anti-apartheid leader who led the Black Consciousness Movement that denied racial essentialism, asserted the importance of self-definition of racial identity, and of liberatory work grounded in both of these tenets. Biko, Steve. “The Definition of Black Consciousness.” *South African Student Organization*, (1971): 48-53.

remained cognizant of how I moved throughout space and various places due to this difference in perception.

Layered onto this was the context of the group that I traveled in. Out of the twelve students in the group—seven of whom were from Macalester, two from Swarthmore College, and three from the University of Cape Town—only myself and one other student, also from a U.S. college, self-identified as Black. All of us, as required by the program, lived together in a large house in Mowbray—another of the southern suburbs, located north of Rondebosch, roughly a mile away from the upper campus of the University of Cape Town, where we were taking all of our courses, and only three miles northeast of Maynardville Park in West Wynberg—which will serve as a central point of focus for the remainder of this essay.

As a result of this, I found myself moving throughout Cape Town most often in overwhelmingly white groups: traversing, for the most part, overwhelmingly white spaces (which, needless to say, included all of the spaces in which we lived and attended classes). This was, to say the least, incredibly unsettling for my first time being on the African continent as a Black person. This essay, as such, will be grounded in one of those experiences: a class trip, conducted as a part of “Interrogating Southern African Landscapes”—a course I took while at the University of Cape Town—to Wynberg, one of the other southern suburbs of Cape Town. This essay, as I will detail more in the introduction, will offer my reflections and experiences on that trip placed in conversation with theory and histories on architecture and geography, and some alternatives I witnessed while in Cape Town to the violence(s) present as a result of the layered colonial and apartheid practices of spatial planning.

## **II: Introduction**

Entering Maynardville Park, the point of departure for both this essay and my time in Wynberg that was mediated through the course I took, from the Church Street entrance,<sup>4</sup> I was struck by the emptiness of the space: both with regard to the lack of people on the open swathes of dead or dying grass, and to the lack of plant cover. As

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<sup>4</sup> The bus we took over to Wynberg dropped us off on Church Street, and, as such, we entered the park through the Church Street entrance. This road, while a major east/west thoroughfare in the area, does not hold any additional significance in the context of this work aside from being the literal point of departure (within the broader point of departure).

we walked westward along the path, we crossed a small stream and entered a luscious green area, with numerous types of trees and various other plant life creating a boundary that stood in stark contrast to the east side of the park that we entered.<sup>5</sup> Although two eighteenth century villas<sup>6</sup> were located on the east side of the park—which provides some semblance of an explanation for why the east side is comparatively barren—and the estate’s gardens on the west side, this does not excuse the disinvestment in the east side that has resulted in its continued barrenness. It is because of this, then, that one must ask: *why?* Why is the west side of the park more heavily invested in, and why is the east left empty and (comparatively) lifeless? In an attempt to weave together a response to this, I will examine the relationship between race and space across Wynberg, delving into the relationship(s) between this and the maintenance of architectural aesthetics and the ways in which this ties into structures of racialized power, I will then explore how this impacts who has access to, and conversely who is denied access from, these spaces through the creation of buffer zones. With this as a base, I will then explore the ways in which deceptively violent architectural aesthetics can be challenged through an exploration of Afrofuturist geographies and the Black spatial imaginary: a refutation to the layered violences of spatialized whiteness.

In order to do this, I will piece together observations and musings from the aforementioned excursion, histories of West Wynberg (from the “Guidelines for Conservation and Development of Old Wynberg Village,” compiled for the City Planner’s Department of the City of Cape Town), and numerous contextual and theoretical works on race and space by Frank B. Wilderson III, James Baldwin, Cheryl Harris, Robin D.G. Kelley, and George Lipsitz. Using these works to unpack the insidious relationships between whiteness, place, and space, I will develop from them an understanding of the deceptive aesthetics of spatial violence; and then turn to works by Pippin Anderson et. al. and Noëleen Murray and Leslie Witz to make clear the ways in which buffer zones are used to amplify the impact of these deceptively violent architectural aesthetics to reify colonial-apartheid patterns of racial exclusion and harm. Holding this all together, I

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<sup>5</sup> Note Appendix B for a map of Maynardville Park that reveals the contrast in vegetation between its east and west sides.

<sup>6</sup> For additional analysis and explanation of this, refer to the subsection “A Few Notes on Nomenclature,” within “The Deceptive Aesthetics of Spatial Violence.”

will deftly draw this exploration of space and place to a close by turning to the work of Kodwo Eshun, Masiyaleti Mbewe, and George Lipsitz to frame conversations around Afrofuturis(m/t-spaces) and the Black spatial imaginary in order to consider how the Edith Stephens Nature Reserve stands an exemplar of the refutation the spatial (il)logics and violences of West Wynberg—centering people and challenges structural relationships of domination and subjugation—and how the example it sets can be seen within the context of Main Road and East Wynberg, in relation to reworked relationships between material and cultural capital therein.

### III: The Deceptive Aesthetics of Spatial Violence

#### a. *A Few Notes on Nomenclature*

Exiting Maynardville Park through its southwesternmost gate, we entered ‘Chelsea Village’: an area made distinct by the densely packed and well-maintained, white, colonial (-esque) buildings, complete with wrought iron ornamentations throughout. Indeed, this area felt like what I can only imagine to be its namesake—Chelsea, London—to the extent that it emanated a certain elitist, white air, complete with small boutiques, antique shops, a bakery, and more. This relationship between these places begs the question, then: why does this place bear that name? What are the implications of this?

Frank B. Wilderson III, a Black American intellectual and activist who spent time in the early 1990s teaching and organizing in South Africa, writes extensively on the power that place-names hold and the violence and histories of structural harm that they represent, too. In “Grammar and Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom,” Wilderson—in discussing the place-names of, and within, Africa and the Caribbean—notes that “no other place names depend upon such violence,” and that they are deeply rooted in a “semiotics of death.”<sup>7</sup> Here, they (the semiotics of death) are connected to the layered histories of settler-colonialism and apartheid: as the various place-names of West Wynberg<sup>8</sup>—Chelsea Village, Little Chelsea, and Old Wynberg Village—all invoke a

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<sup>7</sup> Wilderson, Frank B. “Grammar & Ghosts: The Performative Limits of African Freedom.” *Theatre Survey*, 50, no. 1 (2009): 119–125. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S004055740900009X>.

<sup>8</sup> I deliberately elect to refer to this place, east of Hoerikwaggo and west of Maynardville Park—which, as I mentioned, serves as the point of departure for this essay—as West Wynberg rather than any of the other place names I use within this subsection—even as I recognize I am not avoiding violent naming practices wholly, for the names ‘Wynberg’ and ‘Maynardville’ themselves are ones that arise out of these histories, too.

sense of nostalgia and hold with them the histories of violence that enabled their imposition and continued existence—what Wilderson terms “ghosts,” or the memory that these places hold.<sup>9</sup> In the case of Maynardville Park and Chelsea Village, in particular—and as I will discuss in greater depth later—these ghosts take the form of the layered British and Dutch colonization as well as the spatial violence of apartheid and the Group Areas Act (particularly with regard to the latter); and the naming of Maynardville Park after James Maynard, a financier who built an estate (“Maynard Villa”) on the land that is now the park (which was, also, previously stolen/owned by the Dutch East India Company).<sup>10</sup> As I was walking throughout this area of West Wynberg, I could not help but think of the ways in which the violence of these place-names was exacerbated by the black iron plaques that adorned nearly every building. Inscribed with the name of the building, or area, these plaques bore words such as “cottage,” “courtyard,” “village,” and “estate.” Through the use and prominence of this language, one can see how the false sense of nostalgia and tranquility—which are, in actuality, rooted in the semiotics of death Wilderson refers to—is built through the violent ghosts that these spaces hold within them.

b. *A Manufactured, White(ned) Place*<sup>11</sup>

With West Wynberg’s place-names and placards creating a place that may be thought of as “idyllic” by some, yet far from that for so many others, begs the question: at whose expense does this come, and for whom is it “perfect”? What are the consequences of maintaining this village? What are the more material layered violences present in its maintenance?

Core to the creation and continuation of the project of this part of West Wynberg has been an investment in creating a space only intended for those with access to whiteness; a project in maintaining an area as white as buildings that they have worked to uphold. James Baldwin and Cheryl Harris offer powerful insight into the construction

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<sup>9</sup> Wilderson, “Grammar & Ghosts,” 119.

<sup>10</sup> Recreation and Parks Department of the City of Cape Town, *A History of Cape Town’s District Parks*, Online Report. <https://resource.capetown.gov.za/documentcentre/Documents/Graphics%20and%20educational%20material/A%20HISTORY%20OF%20DISTRICT%20PARKS.pdf> (accessed 06 December 2022).

<sup>11</sup> Note Appendix C for a map of West Wynberg, which highlights colonial machinations present in the space, as well as an outline of the area formally considered to be West Wynberg.

of whiteness, albeit in the context of the United States,<sup>12</sup> noting that whiteness—as it exists as a structural form of power—is predicated on the seizure of land from Indigenous peoples and the dehumanization of Black people.<sup>13</sup> Complicating this within the South African context, where many of the Indigenous peoples are racialized as Black, Black Indigeneity must be considered. In “The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native,” Robin D.G. Kelley notes that white colonizers were (to add my own words: and still are) invested in maintaining control over, and thus in keeping around, “the land *and* the labor,” but were actively engaged in destroying the *people* themselves.<sup>14</sup> Ostensibly, the combination of Baldwin’s notion of a genocidal lie<sup>15</sup> and Kelley’s analysis of Black Indigeneity provides a frame for understanding the way in which the creation of West Wynberg—as it stands—was a project in creating white spaces that excludes Blackness and denies Indigeneity.

With a nuanced understanding of the ways in which whiteness is constructed in opposition (or rather in violent exclusion of) to Blackness and Indigeneity, it is possible to analyze the construction of the physical space of West Wynberg—particularly the “charming” Cape Dutch architecture that is characteristic of the area (although not exclusive to it). With the first land grant to this area being given to the farm “Oude Wynberg”—held by Dutch colonizers—this space later served as a central place for the British military as they continued the settler-colonial project after the Dutch in the early nineteenth century—all while additional buildings were erected in the style similar to that of the residence that was a part of the seventeenth century Dutch farm: all with pristine

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<sup>12</sup> While in Cape Town, I had numerous conversations with my academic advisors (many of whom were white [people residing in South Africa], or otherwise not Black) on my choices to draw upon authors writing outside of an ‘African’ context on whiteness and racialized power. While they have asserted a need to draw from authors from the so-called global South, I have complicated this by asking the question: is the terming of the “global South” actually a question of physical location and relationships to space, or, rather, is it a broadly applied term used to half-assedly refer to relationships of structural—and racialized—power? If that is the case, then, the Black authors from whom I draw *do in fact* write from a position that allows me to engage their work here.

<sup>13</sup> Baldwin, James, and David Roediger (ed.). “On Being ‘White’... And Other Lies.” Essay. In *Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means to Be White*, 177–180. New York City, NY: Schocken Books, 1999.

Harris, Cheryl I. “Whiteness as Property.” *Harvard Law Review*, 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707-1791.

<sup>14</sup> Kelley, Robin D.G. “The Rest of Us: Rethinking Settler and Native.” *American Quarterly*, 69, no. 2 (2017): 267-276.

<sup>15</sup> Baldwin, “On Being ‘White’,” 178.



white, sloping walls; dark wood doors and accenting; and thick thatched roofs.<sup>16</sup> This area, over the course of the next several centuries, served home to core mechanisms of the settler-colonial state: as it became home to a magisterial district around the middle of the nineteenth century, and as the Dutch Reformed Church and St. John's Anglican Church were built around the same time.<sup>17</sup>

Layering upon these histories of colonization and the establishment of a settler state, one must also refer back to legalized-apartheid-era<sup>18</sup> laws and conservation designations to see how this was supported through legal and legal adjacent processes. Passed in 1950, the Group Areas Act declared that all of the southern suburbs, which includes Wynberg, were “for whites only”<sup>19</sup>—save for East Wynberg.<sup>20</sup> This was further entrenched through the 1981 decision of the apartheid-era Cape Town City Council to designate “Old Wynberg Village” an “area of special architectural, aesthetic or historical significance.”<sup>21</sup> As a consequence of this, occupants of buildings in the area (whether they are residential or commercial) had, and have, to receive express permission from the Cape Town City Council—a body of the apartheid government of South Africa at the time of the publication of this report—to either construct or demolish buildings, alter the external appearance of buildings, or affix any signage to buildings.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, these guidelines supported the conservation of the buildings that were erected through layered violent processes of colonization, enforced through apartheid legislation, and upheld through the cost of the area—which bears property values that are several million

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<sup>16</sup> City Planner's Department of the City of Cape Town, *Old Wynberg Village: Guidelines for Conservation and Development*, by John Rennie and Pat Riley (1987): 4.

<sup>17</sup> Rennie and Riley, *Guidelines for Conservation and Development*, 5.

<sup>18</sup> I have elected to use “legalized-apartheid-era” instead of “apartheid” alone to describe the period from 1948-1994, in which herrenvolk ‘democracy’ was in place, as many of the *de jure* realities during that period are present in the realities of so many in the present, albeit as *de facto* realities.

<sup>19</sup> Besteman, Catherine Lowe. *Transforming Cape Town* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> I was first introduced to this area with the name “Lower Wynberg.” In using East Wynberg in lieu of this, I aim to avoid describing the area as “less than” the area that encompasses West Wynberg—which is, conversely, colloquially known as Upper Wynberg. While perhaps this could refer to their elevation, due to their proximity to Hoerikwaggo, I still avoid using it due to the violence(s) that can be contained with that particular nomenclature.

<sup>21</sup> Rennie and Riley, *Guidelines for Conservation and Development*, 2.

<sup>22</sup> Rennie and Riley, *Guidelines for Conservation and Development*, 2.

rand more expensive than properties in the rest of Wynberg<sup>23</sup> (eastbound toward, and beyond, Main Road<sup>24</sup>).

This spatialized white supremacy, and the violences inherent to them, are powerfully discussed by the renowned American and Black Studies scholar George Lipsitz. In “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” Lipsitz pulls together the framework of the white spatial imaginary: practices of exclusion and the “[augmentation] of exchange value,” by way of the maintenance of relationships and community only to the extent that they are able serve to maximize private property values.<sup>25</sup> With the foundations of the relationships between space and people being grounded in a desire to amplify the accretion of material and/or social capital, one can see the ways in which this spatial imaginary fuels the creation of this landscape of white supremacy that continually (re)produces harms to those who do not have access to whiteness.

It is the layering of the violent nomenclature of the space, architectural aesthetics, and legislation and conservation efforts—all within the white spatial imaginary—that I term the deceptive aesthetics of spatial violence: a superficial beauty<sup>26</sup> for those invested in whiteness that is built on and sustained by ongoing violence toward, and the exclusion of, Blackness and Indigeneity. West Wynberg/Chelsea Village is a landscape with violence toward Blackness intentionally manufactured within it and upheld through the façade of the aforementioned carefully crafted aesthetic. Recognizing and naming all of the facets that play into the construction of spaces of

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<sup>23</sup> A quick search of Property24 (a realty company in South Africa) showed that a six-bedroom house in West Wynberg (address unspecified) was listed for R7,500,000 (approx. USD 433,000); and a six-bedroom house in East Wynberg (11 Belfast Rd.) was listed for R2,000,000 (approx. USD 115,000)—a five million-plus rand difference for relatively comparable homes size-, and bedroom,-wise.

<sup>24</sup> One of the primary north/south streets in Wynberg, Main Road connects many of the southern suburbs of Cape Town, including, but not limited to, Rondebosch, Claremont, Mowbray, and, of course, Wynberg. While I was in Cape Town, the house that I stayed at was only a few blocks west of Main Road in Mowbray, which lies several kilometers northwest of Wynberg.

<sup>25</sup> Lipsitz, George. “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race: Theorizing the Hidden Architecture of Landscape,” *Landscape Journal*, 26, no. 1 (2007): 10–23.

<sup>26</sup> I use beauty, in this case, to refer to an ‘orderliness’ that is predicated on the exclusion of an other.

white supremacy is crucial if anticolonial<sup>27</sup> work is to be undertaken in a meaningful fashion.

These deceptive aesthetics of spatial violence were still evident as we moved throughout West Wynberg, nearly thirty years after the end of legalized apartheid. There were several old, white people who walked about the streets and the lanes sprawling throughout Maynardville Park, walking into nearby businesses and perusing their offerings. There were, as far as I could see, no Black people in the space who engaged with the businesses therein, and all of the Black people—save for the two of us in the group who are Black—who I did see were within the liminal areas of the space: whether that be the outskirts of the area, or the edges of the major roads (namely Wolfe Street and Durban Road) that pass through the area. This made this space feel incredibly uncomfortable and isolating, which, reflecting upon it, is ostensibly the goal of how that space was manufactured. Its violences are complex and are deliberately made to appear as if they do not exist.

#### **IV: Barriers within Nothingness & How the Deceptive Aesthetics of Spatial Violence are Enabled**

When space is as deceptively violent as West Wynberg it is important to understand not only how it was created, but also the mechanisms that enable its continued existence. Although I discussed a couple of these in somewhat abstract terms in the prior section, there were also several physical boundaries that I noted whilst walking through the space: both barriers that one would easily identify as such, but also ones that would be more difficult to readily do so. Leaving West Wynberg and walking east toward Main Road, we walked alongside the entire length of Maynardville Park. Two key things stood out to me as we walked along the park, whilst outside of it: first, the roughly three-meter tall fence that runs the perimeter thereof, and secondly, the west-east gradient of the amount of green space in the park.

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<sup>27</sup> I use anticolonial here purposefully in lieu of decolonial. Max Liboiron, a Red River Métis/Michif scholar and Professor of Geography at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, notes that the word “decolonize” has been corrupted by institutions (namely academia)—or, that these institutions have “appropriated Indigenous terms of survivance”—and has been used to further “settler and colonial goals” under the guise of meaningful change. Liboiron, Max. *Pollution is Colonialism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021).

Focusing on the latter first, I turn to Dr. Pippin Anderson et. al.'s work on urban ecological gradients to provide a foundational explanation of this. Anderson notes that species richness tends to decline across socioeconomic gradients, in a phenomenon known as the "luxury effect."<sup>28</sup> Walking along this gradient, I saw a rapid decline in the amount of vegetation in the park on the east side of the stream that intersects the park, with there being a sharp transition to open grassy areas with trees sparsely distributed throughout. This is once again reflective of the disinvestment in non-white spaces, partially as an effect of the overinvestment in the white supremacist spaces (although any investment therein is an overinvestment, to be clear), and the violence that is inherent to white spaces, which is upheld by Anderson as she notes that "research [has demonstrated that there is an improvement in] mental and physical wellbeing" in areas with more green space.<sup>29</sup>

Beyond this, however, this gradient plays another role in the maintenance of the violent aesthetics of West Wynberg: a buffer zone. This terminology most frequently appears within conservation literature in the natural sciences, and is—in one instance—defined by the *Water Information Network - South Africa* as "a strip of land with a use, function or zoning specifically designed to protect one area of land against impacts from another."<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this essay, however, I expand this conceptualization of buffer zones to encompass areas of land that—in effect (so, in other words, through either formal policy or practice)—demarcate areas of (racialized) exclusion and are rooted in ongoing historical practices of spatialized violence, effectively creating boundaries without having physical barriers in place. In reflecting upon how I felt walking along Maynardville Park, with what Michaels' offered in mind, the east side of the park is quite an impressive buffer zone. While there were a few people who were walking about it, it was overwhelmingly empty; yet, on the other side of the park, near

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<sup>28</sup> Anderson also notes that species richness is relatively consistent across all public spaces, which is distinct from the presence of green space, and greenery, in general as I refer to it here with regard to the "luxury effect."

Anderson, Pippin et. al., "Post-apartheid ecologies in the City of Cape Town: An examination of plant functional traits in relation to urban gradients", *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 193, (2020): 1-10.

<sup>29</sup> Anderson et. al., "Post-apartheid ecologies in the City of Cape Town," 7-8.

<sup>30</sup> Water Information Network South Africa, "Buffer Zones: Ensuring rivers, wetlands and estuaries are protected and conserved," (2015).

Main Road, there was a buzz of energy as people were present throughout the space, detached from the intentionally secluded, white, space of West Wynberg. It was in this space that I began to feel more comfortable, which I attribute (upon reflecting more on the excursion) to the space being one not designed to protect whiteness. When combined with the fences around the park, the west half of Maynardville Park is an imposing barrier and one that appears to work all too well to maintain the white space to the west of it.

This use of empty space as a barrier to separate non-white spaces from white ones is a practice that has occurred in documented instances other than the one I noted, with Lwandle jumping to mind. Initially built as an impermanent migrant labor camp that was transformed into a permanent community through residents' collective action, Lwandle was strategically located to be invisible: close enough to the neighboring Somerset West and Strand, but "far enough to appear as a spatially distinct, separate, perhaps even rural, locality"; with a "250-yard 'buffer zone' [between it and the] National Road."<sup>31</sup> This use of a buffer zone, not entirely distinct from the example provided by Lwandle, as a barrier to render non-white communities invisible is directly related to the maintenance of the aesthetic of whiteness—rendering the people invisible, as Kelley notes, in such a way that strengthens the effectiveness of the layered buffer zone-fence barrier.

### **V: A Refutation of the Deceptive Aesthetics of Spatial Violence**

#### *a. Understanding the Black Spatial Imaginary in Cape Town: A Brief Look at Edith Stephens*<sup>32</sup>

If one were to drive along the N1 highway (the bold yellow line, in Appendix C, directly below the pin at Edith Stephens) that runs parallel to the reserve, it would be incredibly easy to overlook it. But to overlook it is to fail to acknowledge the richness of the place occupying a seemingly unassuming space. According to Stacy Michels, Edith Stephens works to create a conservation effort that prioritizes peoples' humanity and wellbeing as much as the conservation of the Cape Flats wetlands (and the critically

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<sup>31</sup> Murray, Noëleen and Leslie Witz, "Camp Lwandle: Rehabilitating a migrant labour hostel at the seaside", *Social Dynamics*, 39, no. 1, (2013): 51-74.

<sup>32</sup> Refer to Appendix D for a map of Wynberg in relation to Edith Stephens.

endangered species within it). Indeed, within the “peripheral,” space that it occupies between Mannenberg, Philippi, and Sweet Home, Edith Stephens embraces ever-shifting “ecologies of practices”<sup>33</sup> that allow them to provide space for the neighboring communities. This adaptive practice was evident within Stacy Michels’ description of the reserve’s efforts alongside community members to set up a recycling facility/business on the grounds of the reserve to make up for the lack of a nearby facility, as a result, likely, of layered processes of “organized abandonment.”<sup>34</sup>

In embracing the adaptive, Edith Stephens defies the (il)logics of the white spatial imaginary that dictate that space only be used in ways that are able to generate capital (in whatever form it may take) for the already wealthy. The realization of the Black spatial imaginary within Edith Stephens—which George Lipsitz defines as a relational socio-spatial practice that emphasizes “use-value” over exchange value and demands the mobilization of community for services that support them<sup>35</sup>—resists the abandonment of communities by governmental entities that are supposed to help, and creates incremental pathways for the development of futures. This imagined space made real falls in line with an understanding of Afrofuturism—drawn together from the works of Masiyaleti Mbewe and Kodwo Eshun—that understands it to be the production of “counter-futures” within the context of people’s present realities, through processes of “disalienation,”<sup>36</sup> in order to radically assert belonging and place through the destruction of that which is deemed ‘normal.’<sup>37</sup> These processes require a connection to futures that existed before they were intentionally destroyed, and/or hidden, by the layered violences of settler-colonialism and apartheid (including but not limited to the ones discussed above), and the (re)centering of Blackness and connections to space; all of which are futures that lay within the past. The Black spatial imaginary, therefore, is

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<sup>33</sup> Gabrielsson, Catharina, "Staying with the Trouble on the Flats", *Architectural Theory Review*, 22, no. 1, (2018): 83-99.

<sup>34</sup> Wilson Gilmore, Ruth, *Geographies of Racial Capitalism*. YouTube. Antipode Foundation. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI>, (2020).

<sup>35</sup> Lipsitz, “The Racialization of Space and the Spatialization of Race,” 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> Eshun, Kodwo, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism", *CR: The New Centennial Review*, no. 2, (2003): 287-302.

<sup>37</sup> Mbewe, Masiyaleti, “The Afrofuturist Village,” *Feminist Africa*, 2, no. 2, (2021): 108-113.

*fundamentally* connected to the future. The Black spatial imaginary is a framework for the realization of Afrofuturist space.

*b. (re)Connecting to Wynberg and Considerations of (Banal) Afrofuturist Space*

Beyond the buffer zone of Maynardville Park and its exceedingly tall mesh and wrought iron perimeter fences,<sup>38</sup> we entered the broad area of the westernmost part of East Wynberg and Main Road. Standing in stark contrast to the deceptively violent aesthetics of West Wynberg, and the ongoing histories of white supremacy and settler-colonialism that (re)produce(ed) them, Main Road bustled with the energy of people moving between a multitude of different business (that were situated both within storefronts and on the sidewalks), grabbing food from restaurants or vendors, or otherwise heading to their destinations. In order to dissect the relationship between this space and Afrofuturism, I will first piece through relationships between material and cultural capital(s), and discuss how—through subversive relationships between the two—Main Road serves as a realized Afrofuturist space, leaning more heavily into Mbewe’s conceptualizations of these futurisms as being that of the *everyday* rather than the *extraordinary*—one that generates futures in the present in resistance to, and in spite of, forced futurelessness.

In order to rethink relationships between these forms of capital outside of the white spatial imaginary that dictates their relationship within the West Wynberg,<sup>39</sup> I turn to an example presented in an article by Shari Daya and Raksha Authar, wherein they

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<sup>38</sup> An entirely separate essay can be written on the spatialization of policing and (sur/sous)veillance in Cape Town. Tall fences and/or walls, laced with electrified wire, akin to these surrounded nearly every home I saw in the southern suburbs of the city; and security officers patrolled the streets of Mowbray near where I stayed (typically, I would see between five and ten people in this role on my daily walk up to the University of Cape Town’s upper campus). While jarring, this was not something that was new to me, as these types of fences and gates are prevalent throughout Jamaica, where my family lives. Anywho, a work on the spatialization of policing in Black-led (and/or Afro-diasporic), but colonized, contexts is now in the list of things I hope to write on at some point in the not too distant future.

<sup>39</sup> Within the context of the white spatial imaginary of West Wynberg, cultural and material capital are inextricable: for if the purpose of cultural capital is to augment material capital, and vice-versa, it is nigh-impossible for the two to be addressed separately from one another. The white spatial imaginary demands just that; that cultural capital—whether it be in the embodied form (i.e.; fitting within notions of propriety demanded by whiteness), objectified form (i.e.; the example of the architectural aesthetics offered above), or the institutionalized state (i.e.; conferred by education, to which there is higher access in wealthier areas)—be engaged to maximize the accretion of material capital. Bourdieu, Pierre, *Forms of Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986).

unpack narratives of women working in the Heiveld Rooibos Cooperative.<sup>40</sup> Daya and Authar, herein, find that the acquisition of material capital is about more than simply owning things, it is a method of realizing autonomy and challenging gendered power dynamics; it is “the realm within which both the individual and the collective... are constituted.”<sup>41</sup> It is here that it becomes abundantly evident that material and cultural capital are reimagined in a way divorced from the white spatial imaginary: cultural capital signifies the material, the material, in turn, allows for the generation of a cultural capital that resists structural oppression. They do not augment each other to reinforce domination, they complement each other to tear it down.

Through this, then, and by valuing use value over exchange value, the direct connection between cultural capital and material capital is broken: cultural capital, outside of the colonial imagination, becomes something that is geared toward sustaining community. Beyond merely sustaining community, however, the cultural capital is a liberally-interpreted variation on an embodied capital, a cultural capital of *use*<sup>42</sup> and *resistance* to the attempted destruction of futures by white supremacist structures of power.

However, discussing resistance and capital in this context is intensely complicated. Catherine Besteman, in her work *Transforming Cape Town*, draws this into stark relief as she addresses the way in which the continued presence of Black people in townships is a “material [truth] rather than a cultural,” a result of poverty created and upheld through systematic oppression and abandonment.<sup>43</sup> In contrast to this, the relationships of capital I discuss here are not ones that glamorize difficult conditions, created by processes of systematic abandonment; rather, these relationships exist to sustain communities *in spite of* continued efforts by the government to destroy their futures.

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<sup>40</sup> I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to visit the town in which the Heiveld Rooibos Cooperative is located, in the southwesternmost portion of the Northern Cape Province.

<sup>41</sup> Daya, Shari and Raksha Authar, "Self, others and objects in an 'alternative economy': Personal narratives from the Heiveld Rooibos Cooperative", *Geoforum*, 43, no. 5, (2012): 885-893, 891.

<sup>42</sup> Here I use 'use' to describe the active engagement of cultural capital that is in line with Lipsitz's definition of the Black spatial imaginary and the augmentation of use value within it.

<sup>43</sup> Besteman, *Transforming Cape Town*, 52.



This form of the Black spatial imaginary can be seen in Wynberg through the taxi rank and various food stands and small businesses that are all interconnected in their operation throughout it, and alongside Main Road. Within this, material<sup>44</sup> and cultural capital do not augment each other in such a way that reinforces structures of domination and violent exclusion, privileging a few at the expense of many. Rather, they work to provide for the community and the public in a way seemingly more in line with the model presented by the Heiveld Cooperative. It can be understood, therefore, that the Black spatial imaginary does not value the senseless accretion of capital, but rather the use of both as a resource for the public good—whatever it may be determined as within any given context.

Turning back once more to the iteration of Afrofuturism articulated by Mbewe, one can see how their vision of futures within the banal—futures within the present—are readily evident in the engagement of the Black spatial imaginary in Main Road. These futures are not ones that, like some iterations of Afrofuturism,<sup>45</sup> locate themselves among the stars or the surreal, among other worlds or distant places; futures that are riddled with elitist undertones. Rather, they assert futures in the present by creating space to sustain communities. The other worlds of the Afrofuturist space in Main Road and East Wynberg is a world that challenges the violence of white supremacist and settler colonial realities. Indeed, these futures are ones that abandon the deceptively violent (exclusionary and profiteering) aesthetics of West Wynberg in favor of modes of negotiating space that, although not entirely divorced from larger structures of racialized capitalism, prioritize the humanity and futures of those who have been harmed by the aforementioned white supremacist and settler colonial realities.

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<sup>44</sup> Within the context of the Black spatial imaginary in West Wynberg, I use material capital to refer to the spaces within the area, and to the various shopfronts and goods that were being exchanged throughout them. While I use the same language, broadly, here to refer to this reworked capital as I do capital that prioritizes the accretion of wealth over all else, I must stress that they are quite distinct from one another.

<sup>45</sup> This iteration of Afrofuturism is exemplified by Sun Ra: a genre-defying, although often labelled as avant-garde, jazz musician and cultural theorist, Sun Ra and his Arkestra built the early sonic underpinnings of Afrofuturism. His work envisaged Black people travelling throughout space in search of places that we could define and be within; breaking free from rote structures of oppression. This can be best understood through several of his most popular songs, including “Tapestry from an Asteroid,” “Outer Nothingness,” “Hour of Parting,” and “When There Is No Sun.”

## VI: Conclusions

Constructed through layered colonial and apartheid histories and a *possessive investment in whiteness*,<sup>46</sup> the deceptive aesthetics of spatialized violence provides one way to consider how structures of racialization—and the material and social harms they beget—are created within physical space. This is further strengthened by the use of layered barriers—conventional and otherwise—that all but guarantee the continued existence of these white spaces. Even as these spaces are addressed, working against them poses a difficult task. The layered consideration of the Black spatial imaginary—as a way of rethinking relationships between people, space, and capital—and Afrofuturism—as a combination of histories of resistance and culture to produce futures within the present realities that people live in—in the context of Main Road and East(ern) Wynberg provides one with a way of reimagining how space may be negotiated in ways that center people and their lives over the senseless accretion and preservation of capital and aesthetic that exists as, and within, spatialized white supremacy.

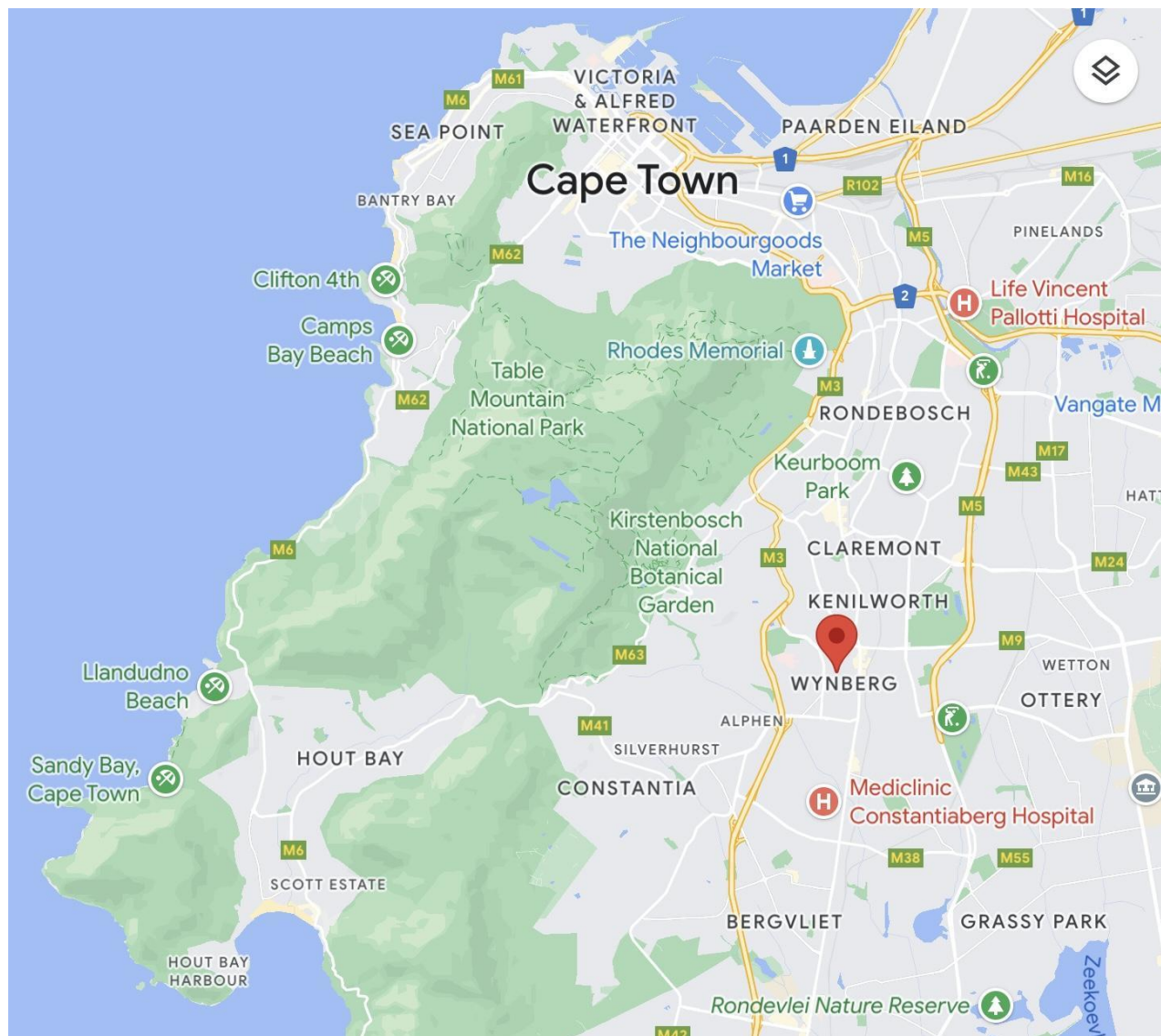
These conversations around spatialized white supremacy and the violences that are perpetuated through an investment into the conservation of aesthetics that are, and and of themselves, wrought through violence are not conversations that are limited to the South African context. Conversations drawing into question the conservation of exclusionary architectures whose histories are riddled with violences and rethinking how these spaces are used and what is prioritized therein can be had, notably, in the neighborhoods surrounding Macalester College (Macalester-Groveland and Highland Park), as well as in numerous other contexts I may not be aware of (and of which there are indubitably far too many to list here). It is crucial that white supremacist landscapes are dismantled wherever they may appear, and that Afrofuturist negotiations of space are centered in their place.

*Toward an Afrofuturist landscape.*

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<sup>46</sup> For this, I credit George Lipsitz—the renowned American and Black Studies scholar—whose magnum opus of the same name, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, lays forth a powerful case for the way in which layered public policy and private practice reproduce racialized structures of power that continually invest and in whiteness.

## Appendices



Appendix A: Cape Town and its Southern Suburbs

*Maps Data: Google, ©2022 / AfriGIS*



Appendix B: A Detailed Map of Maynardville Park

Maps Data: Google, ©2022 / AfriGIS

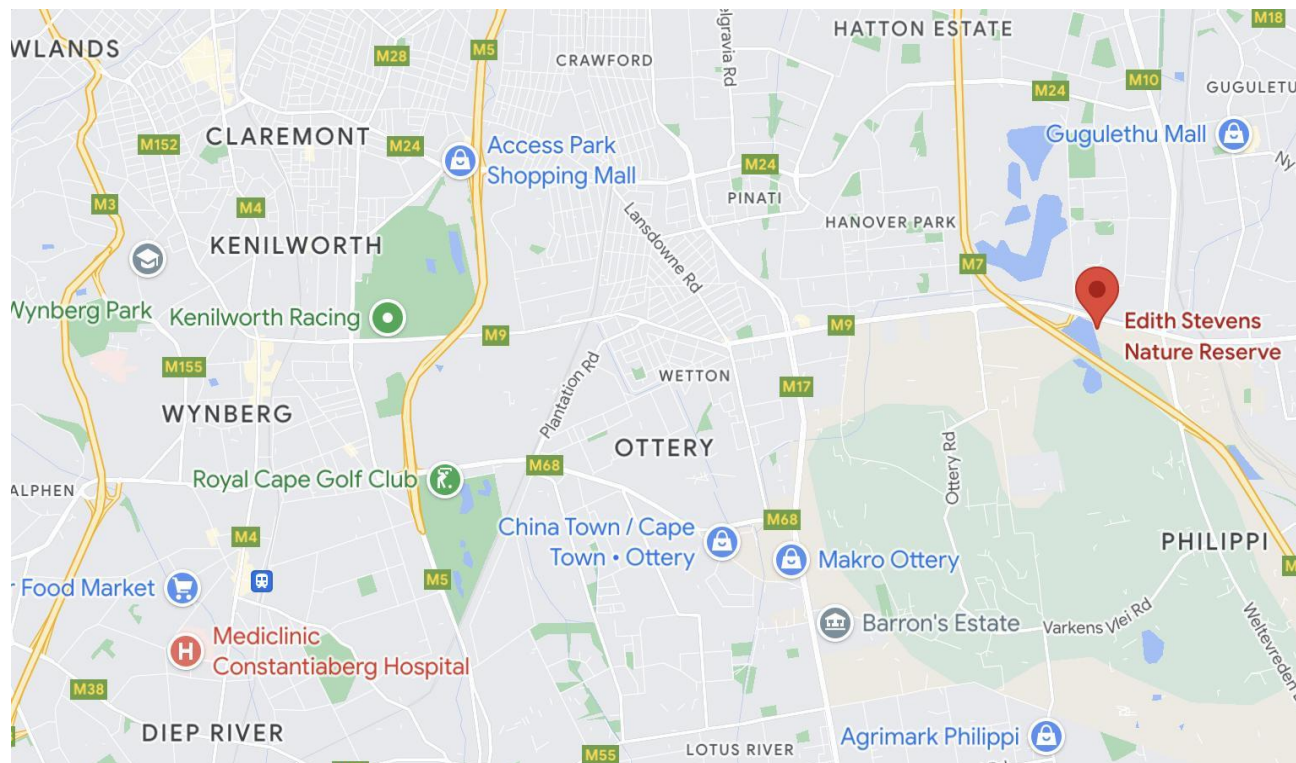




Appendix C: A Map of Wynberg, delineating the formal bounds of West Wynberg (left)<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Rennie and Riley, *Guidelines for Conservation and Development*, 4.



Appendix D: Edith Stevens Nature Reserve (in relation to Wynberg)

Maps Data: Google, ©2022 / AfriGIS

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