

# 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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LESLEY GREEN

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

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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.”<sup>1</sup> 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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Each individual chapter has had a long history, and some sections appeared in prior publications.

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 Bergrievier 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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Chapter 5 began as an anthropology class field trip to see people encountering baboons at the side of the road in 2013, and grew from there. Thanks to Jenni Trethowan and Ruth Kansky for teaching me what you did about baboons; to Donna Haraway for her extensive comments on an earlier version; to Gregory and Lindiwe Mthembu-Salter for hosting me in Scarborough; and to Danny Solomon for sharing his PhD material. Early versions were presented at the Spaces of Attunement workshop at Cardiff University in Wales; also at the Indexing the Human series of Stellenbosch University's

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Near Cape Point. Photo: Lesley Green



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## 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.  
Bloukoppkoggelmanders.  
Tortoises. Baboon spiders. Scorpions.  
Stick insects. Cicadas. Praying mantis.  
Duikers. Steenbökkies.  
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.

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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?

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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.<sup>1</sup>

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.

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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