

Planetary Portals

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Goldsmiths
Press

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First published in 2026 by Goldsmiths Press
Goldsmiths, University of London, New Cross
London SE14 6NW

Printed and bound at CPI, UK.

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A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library

978-1-915983-40-4 Pbk

978-1-915983-41-1 Ebk

www.gold.ac.uk/goldsmiths-press

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

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Series Foreword

Jennifer Gabrys, Ros Gray, and Shela Sheikh

With multiple environmental crises erupting worldwide, the planetary has become a common topic. Yet while studies proliferate that speculate about the state of the planet or propose governance at a planetary scale, they often reinscribe dominant voices, knowledges, and ways of being. The Planetarities series seeks to unsettle prevailing engagements with the planetary by supporting work that grapples with the power dynamics, indeterminate relations, and poetic possibilities of eco-social transformations. Drawing on, extending, and reworking Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of "planetary," the series takes up distinct types of "planet-thought" and "planet-feeling." For Spivak, planetary was a concept that could undo the abstractions of globalism while expanding beyond isolated consolidations of self or identity. With "planetarities," this series further embraces the pluralistic concepts and practices that offer different connections and collectives tied to the planet.

As a series, Planetarities creates a space for work from writers and practitioners within and beyond Western and institutional contexts, with contributions from the Global South, Indigenous communities, and environmental activists working within transdisciplinary and transnational movements. This series seeks to advance theoretical and practice-based work as a plural and diverse collective project that shares a sense of urgency about planetary troubles. The texts in this series attend to planetary inhabitations and problems, from climate migration and environmental justice to multispecies world-building and the geopolitics of extraction. By considering how the planetary is at once summoned and unsettled through ecological and socio-political crises, the series poses a challenge to Anthropocene discourse by decentring the *Anthropos* and instead exploring how the planetary undoes and remakes humans and nonhumans as planetary subjects.

Planetary Portals, the third volume in the series, plunges readers into the deep space-time sedimentations of colonial infrastructures. Ebbensgaard, Holden and Yusoff chart a course from 19th-Century brick construction in east London to mineral extraction and railroad development in southern Africa, showing how enduring earthly relations continue to inform resource geographies and material politics today. In this speculative nonfiction, Cecil Rhodes and OpenAI become tethered, layered and entangled in the extractive dynamics that connect and persist across diamonds and data centres. The planetary residues of colonial infrastructures continue to shape and reproduce the possibilities for environmental life, making this a crucial analysis for understanding the contours of restitution and reparation.

To travel across these folds of space-time, the authors develop the concept and method of the “planetary portal” to tunnel through the “sedimented geographies of planetary transmutation and listen to the geological imprints that form its infrastructures.” The portal does not adhere to a surface-level planetarity. Instead, it inverts the momentum of extraction to write other geo-temporal relations into being. *Planetary Portals* torques and bends the “discovery” of minerals that enabled colonialism’s extractive infrastructures into other maps for epistemic repair and liberatory potential, opening and cultivating waylines for planetary conditions beyond the recurring damages of coloniality.

Maps, archives, and equations are the devices that guide readers on this passage. Maps that would demarcate possession become consumed by the margins they would delineate. Archival images carve channels across desire and destitution. Equations unfold the force multipliers of material transformation and geographical imagination as they are held in a taut balance with the planetary portal, subtended by the negative space of extraction. With these instruments, readers are asked to consider how environmental subjects come into being through earthly transformations. The portalling method guides readers to pause at critical inflection points of repair to consider how to work toward anticolonial earthly relations.

We are grateful to the team at Goldsmiths Press, led by Sarah Kember, for their ongoing support for the Planetarities series and this third volume, which expands and advances engagements with environmental upheaval. We extend thanks to Susan Kelly, Ellen Parnavelas, Angela Thompson and Kobe Reynders for carefully stewarding the development and production of *Planetary Portals*, and to Katie Finnegan for her thorough copyediting. Finally, we thank Casper Laing Ebbensgaard, Kerry Holden and Kathryn Yusoff for scratching the surface of planetarity to plot a course toward more exuberant spatial imaginaries and less extractive material worlds.



Preface

Geography is mobilised in its doing, from one place to another, from staying held to holding tight as the world moves. Moving and acting as geographical subjects is often compelled by the ability to imagine and apprehend sets of earthly relations in their dynamic continuance – as an unfolding of maps, of intent and the ability to read the room – whereby something is expanded, confirmed or exalted, or alternatively made small, ejected or abandoned by *how* those maps are drawn and by *whom*. The ability to maintain an otherwise in that confluence of pressure and openings is a constant negotiation with exilic conditions – mapping at the margins of someone else’s imaginary. Which is to say geography is relation, and it is the transmutation of the material world, now on a planetary scale. As the layers and polarities of cartographies shift in the wake of anthropogenic geopolitics, how do we account for the epistemic and material conditions that new maps map into? The scaffolds? The remains? The monstrous unaccountability of what is devoured and displaced? As well as the invention that is required to explicate yourself from the map of another’s reasoning and intention? What *appears* and is *seen* is as important as that which is not; that which eludes the grasp of power and maintains itself *anew* in these contexts. In the case of the British Empire, maps produced in abundance to mark the expanding colonial operations lay waste to an intemporal field of atrocities that set down the tracks, so to speak, for on-going and differently dreamt relations. The endurance of spatial projects of the imagination borders and binds the possibility of freedom to make, think and dream the world differently.

As geographers, we¹ have gone looking for a spatial analytic to apprehend these acts of burrowing and surfacing, to understand what propels the transformations and resistances of a *projected planetary* imaginary; to understand

¹ In this instance the ‘we’ is used to refer to the authors.

spatial theory as a way of writing restitution maps into being – a portal into the unsaid dimensions of transformation and their abrasive material residues. We read the portal as a tunnel and a tract, a burrow and an extraction, a spatial flow of forces that punctuates *what* is made to flow and *who* is confined to the containment of spaces. We also understand the planetary has an implied ‘we’ in its narration, which is both a problematic and a possibility of how ‘we’ comes together; and what inclusions, exclusions and solidarities that implies.

Every geography begins in a particular place with prismatic exchanges that fold in distance and difference. The book in your hands is the culmination of a collective process of trying to think through what it means to live and work within the *remains* of the British Empire. And to foreground the importance of materialising a conscious historical geographical connection to the remains flung across the empire. We, the authors, are all tied to England and the tensile relations of Britain’s colonial global history that resides in everyday pedagogical questions of how to teach its bloodied geographical legacy, which despite its official end, refuses to *remain* in ‘the past’. Our shared interest in and concern for Britain’s role in shaping the present planetary crisis (through its colonial legacies and geo-traumas of extraction) not only provided the pedagogical foundations for teaching undergraduate geography students about the fraught grounds of earth writing but also required a new set of languages to apprehend the immensity and depth of the intersectional challenges that accounting for unaccountable geographies faces. Which is to say that geography can be a generative aesthetic practice. The concepts available to us, however, felt inadequate for mapping the spatial debris of empire and the hold of its infrastructural geographies; geographies that no longer emanate out from the metropole that is London but maintain the muscular ambitions and paradigmatic logics of extractive racial capitalism. In this book we develop a new concept of the ‘planetary portal’ to better diagram the sedimented geographies of planetary transmutation and listen to the geological imprints that form its infrastructures. The portal is a gateway between one place and another that is structured by narrative, geophysical, material and imaginative geographies that maintain relations of power and their dissolution. Mapping the portal is a methodology for naming sites of intervention for a chronogeography of epistemic repair.

Our coming together in 2019 happened during the beginnings of a period of political and planetary upheaval: the gradual spread of COVID-19, which turned into a fully flung pandemic by early 2020, was that same year followed by protests rallying around the US-ignited Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in response to the suffocation and murder of George Floyd. In the UK,

BLM protests took many forms, but most prominently through the tearing down of the statue of slave owner and trader Edward Colston in Bristol and dragging his bronze cipher across the harbour and dumping it at the bottom of the port. While prompting a national debate around the way Britain commemorates rather than condemns its colonial past, the rally cry ‘Colston Must Fall’ referenced and formed an alliance with the ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ campaign, which started in Cape Town in 2015 and later ignited campaigners in Oxford, UK – targeting Oriel College where Rhodes matriculated in 1873 and to which he left a substantial endowment. Alongside ‘Rhodes Must Fall’ sat an equally important demand from South African students that ‘Science Must Fall’, which campaigned against the exceptionalism of Western science as the dominant and dominating episteme through which South Africa, as well as the Africa continent, continues to be interpolated into world history (see Canham and Seedat 2025).

In our shared geography of London’s East End, calls to tear down the monuments of empire have been manifest in demands to review the citational practices of streets, buildings and institutions across the London boroughs of Hackney (Sir Robert Aske, Sir John Cass, Francis Tyssen, Cecil John Rhodes, Robert Geffrye) and Tower Hamlets (Sir John Cass, William Gladstone, Robert Millington). Sparked by the protests that characterised this planetary impasse of the violence of global anti-Blackness, the councils of Hackney and Tower Hamlets launched initiatives to review prominent street and building names. In Hackney, the council-led initiative to ‘review, rename and reclaim’ the Rhodes Estate in Hackney, east London stood in stark opposition to the Conservative UK government’s guidelines to ‘retain and explain’. Discovering that a vast amount of our – that is, the authors’ – local neighbourhood was owned and built by the family of Cecil J. Rhodes (1853–1902), and that its later use as slum housing racking up rents amounting to an annual income of £600,000, which played a part in funding the diamond-extracting empires across southern Africa, shifted our attention to another geography. When the local residents on the Rhodes Estate – aided by the council – initiated the process of renaming the estate, questions arose about what could *not* be removed; a name can be changed, but the vast international structures of extractive racial capitalism that once fanned out from the Dalston estate remain active today. How do residents of the Rhodes Estate embody unseen and complex geographical relations with the infrastructures and intimacies of life across southern Africa? Put another way, we were driven by the following question: *When statues fall, what remains?* Those remains of geographical ideation and imagination (the blueprints,

maps, cartographies of reason that shaped infrastructural dreams) also asked questions about the depths of the symbolic and the spatial, the propulsion of the seen and unseen, and the material geographies of attribution and restitution.

This book is our response to those questions. It traces how the legacies of British colonialism reach into the contemporary moment through complex webs of infrastructural arrangements, environmental transformations and technological devices of the imaginary. We develop the 'portal' as a concept and method for mapping the affective architectures of colonialism that never really ended with the fall of the British Empire (did it ever 'fall'?) but which uphold a (neo)colonial order that feeds a white supremacist dream, which we see exercised in the recent popularisation of far-right extremism coupled with imperial nostalgia and, specifically, in the South African natal geographies of Silicon Valley tech entrepreneurs and their digital infrastructures of white supremacy. Alongside, we take inspiration from the invocation of portals in science fiction writing and film, as they enable travel through time, wormholes or pluriversal dimensions; here, however, we develop the portal as both an optic and mapping device that illuminates *how* geographies get entangled in the extant of colonial dreams, materialised in extractive realities and sustained by the continued force of their exilic displacements. As a geographical medium of planetary relation and extraction, the portal is a method for identifying the continued resurfacing of colonialism's pasts and exposing how geosocial inequities are continuously re/made and maintained through material dreams of white supremacy as a geography of propulsion.

Acknowledging 'our place' in British colonial geography, we focus on and write from the interdependent geographies that Cecil Rhodes and his family shaped with their land tenure of east London. The Rhodes family transformed the clay-rich Dalston Fields into a lucrative brick industry and mobilised these bricks to build a rentier economy of slum housing in Dalston. From bricks to slum housing, the Rhodes family financed the initial forays into farming in the settler colony of Natal, South Africa. Cecil Rhodes, aged 17, joined his brother, and before long both were active prospectors on the diamond fields. Leveraged by income from London's rentier economy they pursued expansive dreams of controlling the extractive economies of southern Africa. We draw on archival materials and sources from the UK National Archives at Kew, the Rhodes Archives at the Bodleian Libraries in Oxford and the Hackney Archives but also, to degrees, supplemented with sources from archives in Cape Town and Kimberley (the town that sprouted up around the famous diamond mines). Rather than producing a book about Cecil Rhodes the

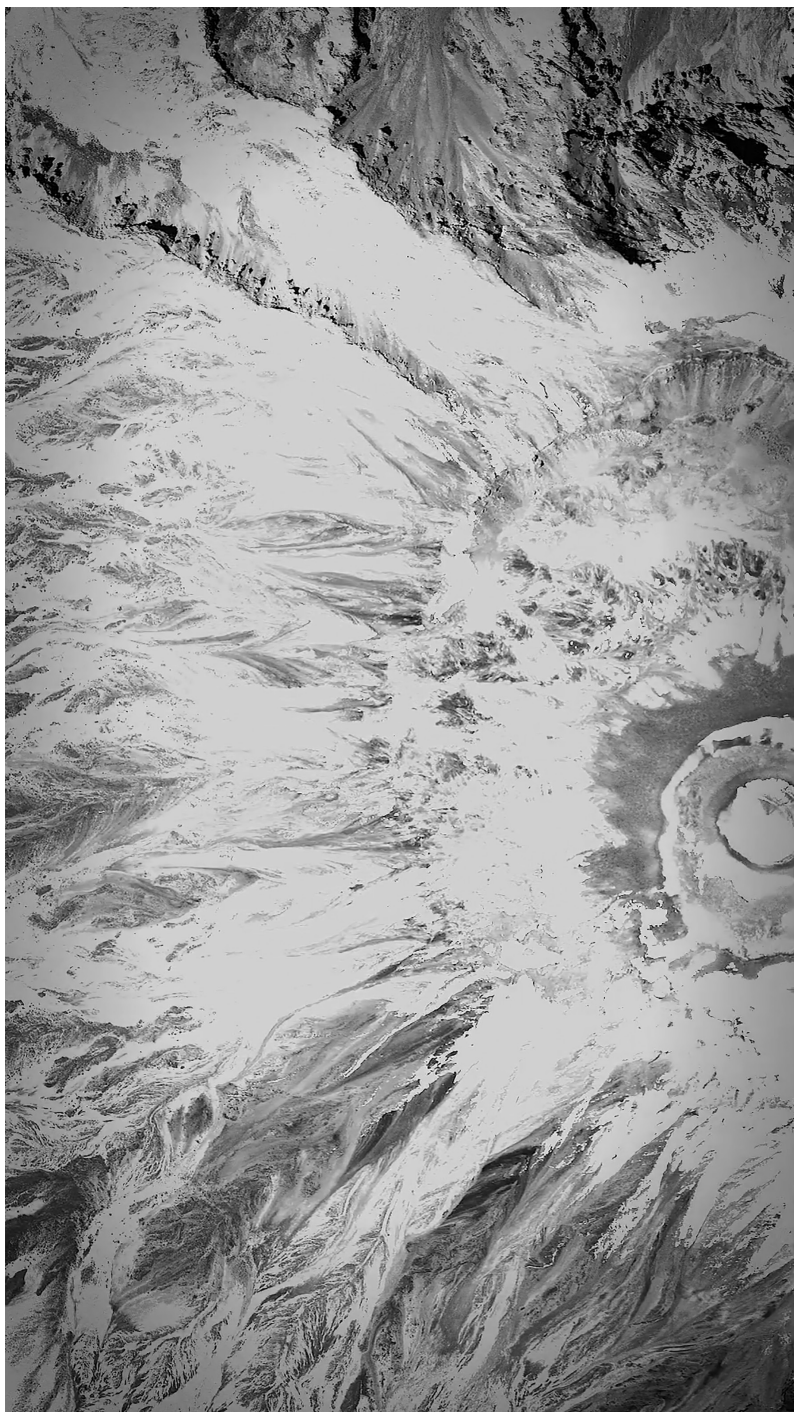
person, however – the mining magnate, politician, empire builder in southern Africa and proto-architect of Apartheid – what follows is an investigation into the material legacy that he came to be representative of: the infrastructural remains that reach across both Britain and southern Africa from the 19th century to today (see Chari 2024). By revealing the material legacy of turning bricks into diamonds, the book exposes how the infrastructural expansion of 19th-century extractive industries laid the groundwork for today's extraction of rare earth elements and the mining of data through the expansion of global data infrastructures, whose pipelines follow the tracks cut by predominantly British colonial interests. In a renewed predation on African materialisms, the global tech industries have joined the extractive industries in a fight to access the reserves of rare earth minerals (estimated at 30 per cent of the world's known resources), essential to their functioning and to the mining of data and digital content that extends across the continent. The imaginary of Africa in the continental geographical arrangement of untapped resource continues to mobilise an extractive view from outside, pushed through other formations. Using the concept of the portal, we trace these chrono-geographical relations and question their conditioning role in this moment of living, imbued as they are by the coordinates of different temporal maps. Aware of the limitations of writing from within the scaffold of colonial power, from Britain, the book explores the geographical imaginary that *connects* east London, from where Rhodes came and drew wealth, to the Cape Colony and the imperial march northwards into Rhodesia (named after Rhodes, and now Zimbabwe and Zambia). It is of course no small irony that we too are part of the production of southern Africa from elsewhere, and all that implies in terms of the geographies of knowledge production and control, but sometimes by looking *with, and again*, along those colonial directionalities other complexities become apparent (in ways that remain important for how the degradation of racialised spatial or environmental fixes are made anew). This is not a book about Rhodes, Britain or South Africa but about the infrastructural arrangements that hold these geographies and temporalities into an on-going material relation and *moving regard*. Our intention is not to reinstate the coloniality of infrastructure but to show how its planetary remains continue to determine environments and possible forms of environmental life, untethered from the colonial centre, yet arbitrarily conditioned to its history of geological extraction and forms of stripping away.

Yet, we also mobilise sources and voices from southern African writers, activists and photographers that push against the authoritative gaze of the colonial archive. The map is not one of 'inside' and 'outside' the portal (the

dualisms of colonial-anticolonial, imperial-resistance, centre-periphery etc.) but of the shared spaces of force that condition the residues and pull of colonising geographies through their remains (across planetary conditions). The book therefore also mobilises the portal as a planetary method for connecting and reassembling colonial geographies in ways that nurture an ethics of epistemic repair and recognise liberatory potentials within the shadows of colonialism. Our commitment is to show how the colonial legacies of violence and environmental destruction imbued in past geographical imaginaries and their colonising architectures of extraction impact subject-environmental formation today (see Chari 2024; Green 2020b). It is not simply that colonial-extractive logics have deadened other histories, voices and ways of living differently and that these stories need to be told (which they do). Rather, the task for us geographers (whose stories these are not) is to rebuild a concept of an environmental subject, where the environment is an indivisible part of an anticolonial possibility and self-determination through speculative non-fiction (in friendship with many Pan African and Asian anticolonial struggles) (see Canham 2023). Speculative non-fiction is a methodology which we use that considers what is known but has been excluded from official accounts. By considering speculation as a crucial dimension of the portal of extraction, we draw attention to generations of geographical imaginaries and environmental fictions of colonised environments as proto-sites of extractive possibility. We understand speculative non-fiction as a means to simultaneously pay attention to forms of restitution made in the pluralising and recovery of environmental archives that speak beyond colonial extraction to environments that might hold displaced subjects in less perilous ways. And, as a process of engaging the 'remains' that are evident within dominant geographical imaginaries, of other ways of living and building worlds.

In *What Moves at the Margin*, Toni Morrison argues for the need to engage an archaeological method in the context of the literary imagination, to speak to the truth of lives flattened by violent intent. As she suggests, you have to 'journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply' (Morrison 2008: 71). The act of the imagination was at once a crucial tool in the colonial armoury and the possibility of breaking out of the strictures of its cloying embrace. Speculative non-fiction takes up the task of geographical imaginations as a critique and counter-cartography, in ways that disturb the historical calcification that accrues around what is absent and missing in the archive and positions the archive as a site of possibility. Fidelity to the remains becomes the path to another kind of speculation that requires noticing what is going on outside and within

the scripts of empire, and in the actual and possible spaces that counter the compression of subjects into categories that flatten all difference, experience and interior lives. Geographical imaginaries are factitious worlds in the sense that they craft the sensibilities, finance, imagination and intent that precede the material facts on the ground. Thus, the imagination of the environment as a possible iteration of the planetary is indivisible from its actualisation (although the actualisation may vary considerably as the imagination meets the uneven, broken grounds and encounters of people and place). The speculative dimensions of geographical imaginations are what enable a geosocial formation (Clark and Yusoff 2017) to emerge (rather than just a haphazard series of events). It is the formation (of a portal) that penetrates lives and deforms the possibilities of refusal and non-alignment. It is precisely the capture of the imagination (through the image) that makes the materiality of the geological text of colonialism so deadly. What becomes powerful about these colonising portals is this conjoining of *speculation* and the *non-fiction* of material transformation. In these ways, the book rearranges archival materials to create a set of speculative non-fictions and spatial languages, to map towards epistemic reparative acts that materialise the collision of the present differently. In this, we move to understand how the planetary is shaped through its extractions and exiles, and how these portals of upward and outward mobility are propelled through the unburied remains of what is below and before.



Introduction

In an 1896 account of the diamondiferous fields at Kimberley, South Africa, J. Bucknall Smith narrates to readers of *The Strand Magazine* in London how, 'In the walls of this rude structure diamonds were discovered which gave rise to the belief that the homestead had been erected over a mine.' The tale follows an Irish immigrant, named O'Reilly, who takes a rest stop at a farmhouse south of the Orange River in the Transvaal territory. Here, he was distracted by 'nice looking' pebbles embedded into the farmhouse walls and managed to extract them for examination and valuation at Grahamstown. He was paid a handsome £400 (equivalent to roughly £68,000 today), which kindled his excitement to discover more (as the origin story goes, narrating the discovery doctrine in the possessive form, without mind for stolen land and stolen geology).

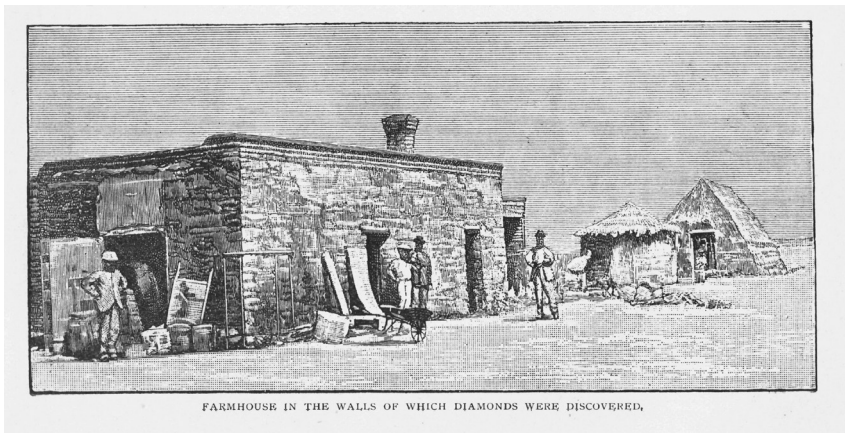


Figure 0.1

Farmhouse in the walls of which diamonds were discovered. Source: Copper print, 1896. J. Bucknall Smith, 'Diamond Mining in South Africa,' *The Strand Magazine*, 1896, pp. 346-354.

While the discovery of the first diamond in South Africa has been disputed and many stories circulate alongside some archival reckoning to have the 'correct' story committed to history (see Green 2020a; Meredith 2007), the article in *The Strand Magazine* adds to the mythology that something so precious could be discovered serendipitously in a place so undistinguished as a farmhouse. According to the author, the figure seen approaching the house is Mr J. Fry, then Chief of the Police Detective Department, on scene, one supposes, to securitise the space of value. The detection of 'valuable stones in the primitive sodwalls of the farmhouse' and the triumphant British imagination of how to harness their value reveals a tale of the transmutation of environment into portable units of capital via imagination and acumen. The author goes on to observe that the 'Boer, however, was too phlegmatic or too ignorant to recognise their nature, or inquire about their value' (Smith 1896), bringing into question *how* value is recognised and by *whom*, denoting the regimes of property ownership, wherein recognition of certain types of value is articulated as a marker of ethno-racial superiority. The story of the discovery of diamonds – the origin story of *diamond power* (see Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine') – pivots on the transformation of a cosmic geological event compressed into a narrative of the benefaction of wealth to the worthy. The stones were underfoot the whole time, waiting to be unearthed by the manly vigour of colonial intent (whereby the 'immigrant' Irishman is claimed by the British press as a genealogical subject through which inheritance can pass). Discovery is equated with acts of material transformation, imagined and scripted in the prising open of an extractive landscape, the organisation of racialised labour, the accumulation of economic value and concentration of political power in the hands of a few white men. The dusty pebble in the wall is dramatised as the opening of a portal that would shape the planetary relation of an environment as always already in service of the discovery of value and continental claims. Land theft, the racialising of power and the dehumanising of subjects falls away as a mere backdrop to the scene of discovery and mastery. The colonial imagination opened material geographies by transforming worlds, making manifest its desire to conjoin London to South Africa through the creation of a portal: an event horizon that transforms geological matter, conceptions of value and imaginations of wealth by naturalising the compression of environments into circuits of discovery, extraction and accumulation.

As a portal that transforms the parameters of time and space, the socio-material dynamics of this event space can be described by the following equation:

$$\text{Equation 1: } [P]p = \frac{im_t^2}{N_{rV}}$$

$[P]$ = the planetary

p = portal

i = affective power of the geographical imagination

m_t = material transformation, as a change of state over time (and its intensification)

N_{rV} = negative space as a generator of value

The planetary portal is a product of geographical imaginaries (i) and the material transformation that alters geophysical environments over time (m_t). The British discovery of valuable diamonds in the ‘the primitive sodwalls of the farmhouse’ in Kimberley reveals how the pairing of colonial dreams of extraction with the material change of state (from stones to monetary value) created a marker of potential and opportunity to transform the land into an extractive mine. The co-dependence of geographical imaginaries and material transformation spirals over time (im_t^2) and intensifies to re/shape the environmental conditions of the land into a resource of future wealth generation (the mine). To do so, however, the instigators of this material-imaginative transformation (i.e. the British discoverers, prospectors, settlers, colonialists and miners) rely on exploitative regimes and extractive logics that transform local populations into ‘native’ labour and land into resource, generating a negative space of exploitation as a necessity for value generation (N_{rV}). One can imagine that leading from the scene depicted in the farmstead (Figure 0.1), British prospectors, miners and politicians would seize or purchase land and expel those without title (often the indigenous communities that remained in the margins of the land that they formerly occupied) and employ unfree or indentured labour to dig and sort the earth in search for gems. The diamond as a geologically designated ‘native element’ (non-metallic elements of carbon and sulphur – diamond and graphite – that

occur in the earth's crust for the most part in a native state) is equated with devalued or negative 'native' labour to generate a site in which value could be realised. The process of colonial extraction relied on what Green (2020a: 98) calls 'the seizure of the commons', the creation of a negative space of exploitation (of environments and people) to produce value. Within the context of planetary extraction (driving the global economy, past, present and future), the negative space is marked by the colonial relations that place race as the conduit for exploitative regimes of extraction as wealth generation. The portal acts like a drill through social relations, inaugurating specific racialisations that organise the separation of the ground (as divisible) from its inhabitants and available for white settlers; a division that is predicated on the most brutal fevers of extraction and the mobilisation of the medium of race as a vector of disqualification (Yusoff 2024). With Equation 1, we aim to render visible the relations and dimensions that define the colonial historical geographies that have transformed the earth, subjectivity and states of being. The negative space of racial debt (as a psychosocial condition that generates an environmental claim) is necessary for the generation of value and, like a vacuum that propels the portal, it upholds the potential of planetary portals to continue the work of racial capitalism to transform earth relations (operating akin to a natural law that maintains its 'suck' through colonial architectures and infrastructures). The equation is a notational form of the temporal and spatial transformations of environments into racialised planetary forms.

Equation 1 is a theoretical tool that accounts for and engenders action around imaginaries and material transformations of time and space that stretch across geographies and shifts in power. The portal is a process and a threshold, of changing one world into another that the imagination gives rise to, executed through the material dynamics of racial value (where value is equal to racial violence). The origin story of the diamond imagined in *The Strand Magazine* follows the genre of romance described by Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark*:

... it had everything: nature subject matter, a system of symbolism, mathematics of the search for self-valorisation and validation – above all, the opportunity to conquer fear imaginatively and to quiet deep insecurities. It offered platforms for moralising and fabulation, and for the imaginative entertainment of violence, sublime incredibility, and terror – and terror's most significant overweening ingredient: darkness, with all the connotative value it awakened. (Morrison 1992: 36–37)

Connotative value as a description of negative space then is enlivened, awakened even, primarily by racial violence (as the dominator), even as this narrative trope remains below the dividing line of the degree zero of the equation, only ever surfacing to denote the positive value above (i.e. in service to colonial whiteness).

Shred

The white and blue diamonds sparkled with quiet and brittle laughter, as though enjoying a hilarious secret. (Wright 2021: 110)

In another story of diamonds pushed into walls, Fred Daniels, the protagonist of Richard Wright's *The Man Who Lived Underground* (2021), is falsely accused of murder by two policemen. In panic, fleeing from a violent police interrogation, he jumps into an open manhole cover and retreats into the underground of New York's sewage system. Making a life underground, Fred finds warmth in heat pipes and light by tapping into electrical circuits. By resurfacing in moments to glimpse at the world above, he finds food and goods to nurture himself. One night, as he wanders through the subterranean tunnel-world he comes across an opening to what appears to be a jewellers, where he recounts: 'I stole some diamonds and rings and watches and a gun and a radio ... But I didn't steal'em to use'em ... I hung up the rings and I put the diamonds on the dirt floor and stomped'em into the ground.' (Wright 2021: 143). By stealing diamonds and bringing them below ground (again), he reverses the capitalist process of generating wealth by pulling minerals out of the ground. By stomping them (back) into the ground of his dirt cave, the stolen diamonds are unburdened of their exchange value, returned instead to their original muddled state, yet full of sparkle 'glinting at him with a million tiny chuckles of icy laughter' (2021: 111). The secret joke fills Fred with 'glorious triumph' as he has reconfigured the subterranean world with the aid of 'rich sparks, collaborating with him' (2021: 111) in his reclamation of self from the over-description of white projection. Fred's invention that is also an inversion challenges the priority of value.

In the reconfiguration of the dark underworld of the sewage system – which stands in for the mine as a subterranean hell – into a diamond-encrusted cave, he engages in an elemental form of collaboration that reshapes a new environment (m_e), to create a new dimensionality of being: 'Brooding over the diamonds on the floor was like looking up into a sky full of stars; the illusion melted into its opposite: He was high up in the air looking down at the twinkling

lights of a sprawling city' (2021: 112). The illusory leap that carries him from one dimensionality into another respatialises the environment not as a form of escape per se but, rather, to create a different dimension of time and space, an insurgent environment that can hold his expelled being and body from the racist surface. Against the brutality of life overground, 'he was propelled to do something, to devise means of action by and through which he could convince those that lived aboveground of the death-like quality of their lives' (2021: 107). Fred is impelled to configure another life (in the negative space of the underground of the built environment) that is not defined by the racism of devaluation (N_{rV}) that pervades the surfaces of its exchange and the objects that mark its connotations and dreams of value, the terms of violence needed to arrive at its realisation. Fred's escape down a manhole cover is an escape but also a portal into the creation of another time and space that stands in opposition to the 'terrible darkness of the day' (2021: 145) and the environment of its brutal injustices. Race (r_V) engineers the pivot between overground and underground, so that a cave becomes a sanctuary and a recalibration of Fred's subjective life.

Against the structures of racial capitalism, Fred's stomping of clean diamonds into the muddy grounds of his cave inverts the logic of planetary extraction: he shreds the planetary portal. If we rework the equation of the planetary portal along the sinuous waves of Fred's shredding stomps, creating vibrations in the earth, we arrive at something like this:

$$\text{Equation 2: } \frac{\sqrt{N_{rV} [P]} p}{i} = m_t$$

$[P]$ = the planetary

p = portal

i = affective power of the geographical imagination

m_t = material transformation, as a change of state over time (and its intensification)

N_{rV} = negative space as a generator of value

By isolating the process of material transformation (m_t), we draw attention to the potential to reconfigure the planetary processes of extraction, producing instead new co-dependent relations. By isolating m_v , we transform the equation of the planetary portal ($[P]p$) into a script for performing new conventions, constellations of being within a reconfigured environment. Just like Fred's removal of the diamond from a lexicon of value, he creates the conditions for a new, insurgent dimensionality of being. The isolation of m_t outlines the process of shredding, of reconfiguring environments to better hold bodies within them in more just and careful ways; to better hold dreams that reimagine landscapes and repopulate them with other imaginaries for being; to build worlds that do not prescribe extractive subjective states of being but which instead take form from a reimagined subjective-environmental relation.

In this way, the shredded portal inverts Marx and Engel's maxim as they write in the *Communist Manifesto* that 'all that is solid melts into air' ([1848] 1967: 83). While they refer to the material transformation of solid states of materials, labour and environments into the invisible, evanescent power of capital, the shredded portal shows instead that all that is air (i.e. speculation, spatial imaginaries and 'dreams' of global homogenisation) transforms material environments into different states of being. The shredding of the portal is the process of reshaping environmental being according to alternative desires, giving the shapelessness of alternative dreams environmental form. In this way, shredding the portal creates an opening for different environments, different worlds, planetary alterities that can hold the injured and injurious bodies in a reparative em/brace. Rather than re/writing portals through reimaginings of subjectivity within pre-existing environments – that merely end up reproducing the destructive body-environment relations that created the problem in the first place – the portal methodology offers a new tool of imagination, not confined by technologies of the imagination (digital technologies, architectures, bureaucracies, maps and so on); but which mobilises material dreams, desires and imaginaries as speculative non-fictions of a new environmental futurity.

Portal as (Existential) Ponzi

British imperialism was built on dreams of conquering places unknown; it was driven by the desire to expand the reach of the empire horizontally across the face of the earth and vertically into the substratum below it (a surface-based territoriality that is fed by the undergrounds and depths) and by building settler architectures above it. With the aid of cartographic technologies and the earth sciences, the volumetric expanse of layered and varied topographies was flattened and rescaled to find representation on two-dimensional surfaces – from maps to diagrams, and from tables to charts – which enabled colonists to compress distances and times into manageable and, crucially, imaginable units. Rosalind Morris (in conversation with William Kentridge's drawings) likens this imagination to the text of an unwritten book inscribed on the terrain, 'as a dream-structure simultaneously oriented forward, to the future, and downward, towards the centre of the earth' that requires an unearthing or a refusal of epistemic renewal (Kentridge and Morris 2021: 173). The arrangement of topographies along curved lines of latitudes and longitudes, and with dotted lines of altitudes and depths, imposes on the globe a virtual grid that places matter according to abstract scientific principles and laws. Topographical maps. Geological survey maps. Cross-section drawings. Taxonomic ranking. Periodic tables. The calculative logics and predictive matrices of imperial science provided a way of scripting the earth in registers of capturing all earthly and live matter and locating it in space and time – making materials, bodies and processes accounted for, measurable and predictable according to the 'natural' laws of science and thus a colonial empirics.

According to Gayatri Spivak, this (colonial-)scientific earth imaginary has produced an image and understanding of the planet as a smooth surface, 'an undivided "natural" space rather than a differentiated political space' (2003: 72). The now universalist scripting of the earth – into maps, diagrams and global systems of exchange – naturalises the idea of a globalised world as an even surface across which materials, bodies, information and ideas flow while neutralising the frictions and resistances of their movement. The measurable planet-as-map constitutes a form of spatio-temporal capture that locks matter within stable states while holding it accountable for its movement through space and time; the planet-as-map enables people to hold the entire world in their imagination, on a map, on their phone, in order to hold it in check. But, while the abstraction of the planet 'allows us to think that we can aim to control it' (Spivak 2003: 72), the map remains

just that, an abstraction. No one, Spivak continues, lives in abstracted space – no person, animal or plant exists on a map, on a phone or in a GPS – suggesting that the planet exceeds our calculative abilities and refuses the reductive logics of map-making. Instead, this excessiveness makes the planet a ‘species of alterity, belonging to another system’ (2003: 72) than the one we have inherited from colonial cartographies, geology and classification systems. By promoting an understanding of planetarity – that is, the planet as alterity – Spivak aims at once to de-centre the human in narratives of earth and planet and, second, to draw attention to the cracks and bumps along and below the false-smooth surface that makes up uneven states of planetarity (see also Gabrys 2018). Exposure to the uneven geographies of environments emerges both in relation to the surface-state (*above* and *below*) and within the long shadows of colonialism (and its afterlives) (see Yusoff 2024). Colonial afterlives are a site of commonality of sorts that binds geographies and people together, albeit in unequal and enduring relations of disadvantage (through structures of trade, finance and debt, for example). Alongside Spivak’s critique of planetarity, we, the authors, ask what kinds of earth thinking (epistemes) and earth relations (aesthetics and collectives) are necessary to develop a method of epistemic repair of the broken earths and subjects in the continual condition of colonial afterlives. How does going below the earth and raising above it through racial hierarchies condition the planet as dimensional beyond the surface territorial plots or colonial historicity of then and now? As Jennifer Gabrys instructs us, ‘The planet might even “overwrite the globe” to undo the assumed uniformity of global systems and exchanges’ so that ‘becoming planetary’ involves attention to ‘colonial imaginations and control, of racial and economic exclusions, of environmental injustices, and of universal science and global abstractions that might be de-figured, superseded, and transformed in the search for more open and just ways of being human *and planetary* that are still to be re-imagined’ (2018, np). In the context of historical geographical imaginaries of control and classification of the earth as planetary, situating colonial afterlives within environmental states is a way to address and form a collective praxis that *is* a shared planetary space, cognisant of its shared unequal histories, rather than propagating the fictional alternative of a homogeneous ‘collective’ planet that shares nothing in common and is still shaped and separated by the material and embodied legacies of colonial environmentalism.

Unsettling the surface of a uniformed globality – an anthropogenic planet imagined as a singular entity rather than an iteration of geosocial forces subject to differentiation, an earth to operate *on*, rather than *with* – gives rise to

the consideration of a punctuated field of relations of granular geological inhabitations that defy the easy classification of humanities' 'weight' or mass as a singular anthropocentric dump. As geologists seek to measure an exoskeleton of ruins (of mine waste, cities, concrete continuums etc.) to calculate the weight of the human 'footprint' on earth, they reserve little concern for the ways that this footprint is also 'a boot stamping on a human face-forever' (to paraphrase George Orwell's description of fascist power). The failure to explain the unequal geographies of this anthropogenic planetary 'weight' – between the underground (as a subjective space and the depository of metal and mineral resources) and the surface operations of power (as racialised and as architectures, infrastructures and data) – misses crucial knowledge of the historical and geographical conditions of extraction and the future possibilities for the reduction of environmental-based harm (that requires the alleviation of historical formations of racialised environments as well as attention to current conditions of environmental racism). The accumulation of more and more things on the earth's surface relies on burrowing deeper and deeper into the ground, subjecting communities and environments to (historically) adjacent conditions of racial injustice and frequencies of exploitation (see Yusoff 2018). *Planetary Portals* takes inspiration from Spivak's notion of planetarity and her appeal to a renewed ethics of the earth when interrogating the uneven states of planetarity that scar the earth within the long shadow of British colonial expansion, specifically with attention to the legacies of gold and diamond extraction in late 19th century in South Africa. Guided by maps and reports provided by land surveyors, geologists, doctors and gemmologists, prospecting gold and diamond miners scavenged the landscape in search of diamondiferous ground and gold-bearing reefs with the aim of 'releasing' the precious minerals from their earthly embrace and bringing them into their 'pure,' brilliant states as valuable gold and gemstones. Bringing minerals into an elemental state of purity established global value systems of exchange to generate wealth that relied on the preconditions of categories of 'raw' states (native/labour/flesh/body/land), coupling mineral purity to racial hierarchies and categorisations (see Yusoff 2024).

One of the most in/famous British prospectors in South Africa was Cecil John Rhodes, who arrived in Cape Town aged 17 having been sent there by his family to improve his health. He was sent to help run the family farm in Natal in place of his brother, who along with many other settler colonialists had rushed to the newly discovered Kimberley diamond fields to try to accrue wealth. Within a few years, Rhodes joined his brother and amassed his empire of mines and political reputation in extraction. From selling ice-cream to mine workers after having imported an ice-making machine from

Britain to draining the main diamond mine at Kimberley from continuously rising groundwater after winning a pumping contract with his collaborator, Charles Rudd – and failing at both – Rhodes started buying up claims and systematically joining up smaller mining operations around Kimberley to form an amalgamation later known as De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd. Thus, in the context of southern Africa, Rhodes replicated the formula of consolidation that he had witnessed transform east London brick fields into slum housing, that is, the Rhodes Estate. Rhodes became chairman of De Beers and oversaw the consolidation of *all* mining operations that would ensure De Beers held a global monopoly not only in diamond mining across southern Africa but also in the global processing of diamonds at diamond-cutting factories in Europe and – through its office registered in Hatton Court, London (the Diamond Trading Company) – in the distribution of diamonds on global markets and exchanges (see Chapter 2, ‘Mimesis and Madness’). The wealth he extracted from diamond operations made him a powerful territorial actor. The consolidation of the diamond mines led to the formation of the British South Africa Company modelled on the British East India Company that in 1889 received a royal charter to enact the ‘scramble for Africa’ in advancing British imperial control over territory across southern Africa. In practice, the charter sanctioned (and legalised) the capture of mineral and land rights, anticipating that the immense wealth to be gained from annexation would be enough to build the wildly ambitious ‘red line’ of infrastructure from Cape to Cairo facilitating settler society and expedient trade routes through the continent (see Chapter 4, ‘Red Lines, White Spots’). In 1890, Rhodes was able to further entrench his political ambitions and expand his continental dreams of Africa as a white (English) continent by becoming prime minister of the Cape Colony (a role from which he was forced to resign due to his involvement in the Jameson Raid to topple Kruger in the north and gain control of the gold mines). During his premiership, Rhodes passed the Glen Grey Act (1894) that articulated the ‘native problem’ as a political problem of how to stimulate labour supply, which he instructed could be resolved by depriving Black people of rights to land through draconian tax reforms that forced men, in particular, into the extraction and adjacent industrial workforce. The Glen Grey Act paved the way for the Natives Land Act (1913) limiting Black land ownership to designated Black territories and townships, which in effect meant ‘to become native in South Africa was to be evicted from space. Shunted into the margins of increasingly unviable land, into “locations” where neither grazing nor the growing of maize could be done on any significant level’ (Morris in Kentridge and Morris 2021: 143). The stock of segregationist policies that

enforced, violently, a racial environmental injustice formed the architecture of the Apartheid regime augmenting white minority rule in the newly formed republic of South Africa from 1948 to 1994.

In resistance to Rhodes's legacy of white supremacy in South Africa – the very visibility of his influence erected in imposing memorials, statues, and the naming of buildings and streets in Cape Town especially – the Rhodes Must Fall campaign launched in 2015 to confront the colonial past and reimagine a possible future for the country, its environments, citizenry and troubled politics. The Rhodes Must Fall campaign echoed an understanding of Rhodes as infrastructure articulated by the journalist Olive Schreiner, who, writing as a contemporary of Rhodes and, at first, as a friend and later a critic, came to the conclusion that:

We fight Rhodes because he means so much oppression, injustice and moral degradation to South Africa; – but if he passed away tomorrow there still remains the terrible fact that something in our society has formed the matrix which has fed, nourished and built up such a man! It is the far future of Africa during the next twenty-five or fifty years which depresses me. I believe we are standing on the top of a long down-ward slope. (Olive Schreiner to John X. Merriman, 3 April 1897, NLSA Cape Town, Special Collections, Olive Schreiner Letters Project transcription)

Schreiner laments the 'terrible fact' that a figure as divisive as Rhodes emerged within the British Empire and his hold in South African society suggests that there was something inherently rotten about the imaginary and material state of the empire. Schreiner's quote points not towards a place as much as a planetary relation, the very matrix that structures and connects London and South Africa. In moving to Oxford, England, the Rhodes Must Fall campaign repositions Rhodes's legacy as emergent in the planetary matrices of colonial imaginaries, racialised administrative power backed by military force, and the expansionist programme of industrial extraction. Understanding Rhodes's influence and augmentation of power through geological materiality and violent coloniality lies in his infrastructural function, not biography. He too was made, configured in the prisms of existing and expanding power structures.

Rhodes's legacy as a political power magnate from a family of slum housing landlords in east London is important for understanding how racial capitalism emerges and operates. The Rhodes family owned land around Kingsland Road in Dalston, north-east London, which at the time was known as the Dalston brickfields. While his predecessors ventured into the brick-making

business, they soon saw a business opportunity in using the bricks themselves to build housing for rent, creating a self-sustaining rentier economy. With the North London line extension in 1848, running from Liverpool Street Station in the City of London north through Dalston, the demand for housing quickly grew, providing local landowners with an option to turn their brickfields into housing estates – on the very same earth from which the bricks came (see Figure 0.2; Ebbensgaard et al. 2022). From clay to brick to multi-occupational houses sublet to the growing working and middle classes for rent, the rentier economy formed part of the matrix that shaped Cecil Rhodes. As he later inherited his share of the London estates (which included estates in Islington as well as Dalston), he quickly bought out his siblings and cousins and, thus, came to own the entire estates in north London from his residence in Groote Schuur, Cape Town, accruing annual rack rents equivalent to £600,000 today (see Chapter 4, ‘Red Lines, White Spots’). When his upbringing among earth prospectors-cum-slum landlords is coupled with his success in attracting financial investment, it is little surprise that his subterranean operations in South Africa were founded on the very same extractive principles of breaking land (and people) in order to build infrastructural complexes that wielded a hellish kind of power: diamond power.

Planetary Portals takes not Rhodes the person, but rather the material life and legacies of his actions that extend from slum housing in east London to southern Africa, as a starting point for developing an understanding of planetary power as operating through a historicised elementalism of the diamond – diamond power. Geographically, we do not draw attention to either east London or South Africa. Instead, we focus on the distended geographies that emerge within the planetary formation of racial capitalism – like a spatio-temporal flip between two material and imaginative openings. Practically, this means that we zoom in and out of places connecting southern Africa and the world through the lens of the portal.¹ Analytically, we develop the portal as a tool for mapping the conditioning effects of colonial geology, infrastructure, administration and governance. We work towards an understanding of how the material architectures of racial capitalism configure the present

¹ As noted in the preface, we do so conscious of the limitations of writing from within the heart of colonial power, from Britain, developing the portal not as a positional geography, providing a view *of* Africa, but rather as a prismatic perspectivism that foregrounds relations, connections and assembled geographies (see also Hecht 2023).

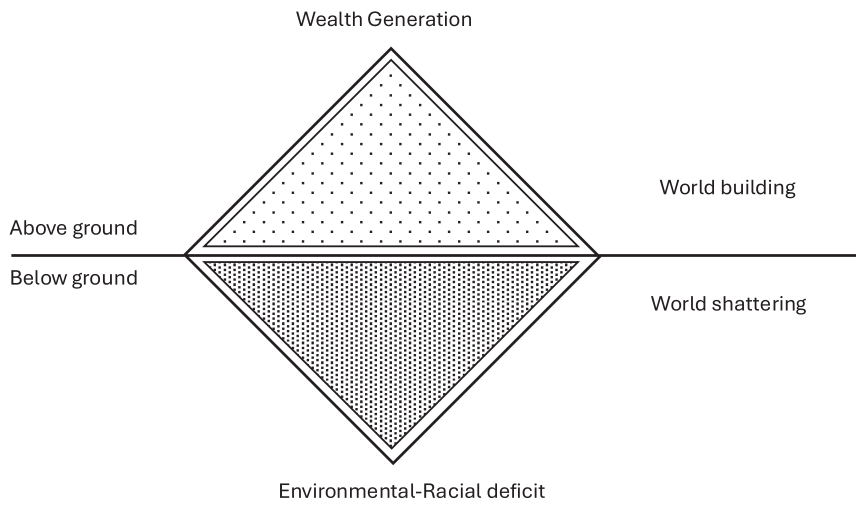


Figure 0.3

The planetary portal as a spatio-temporal pivot and Ponzi. Source: *Planetary Portals Collective*.

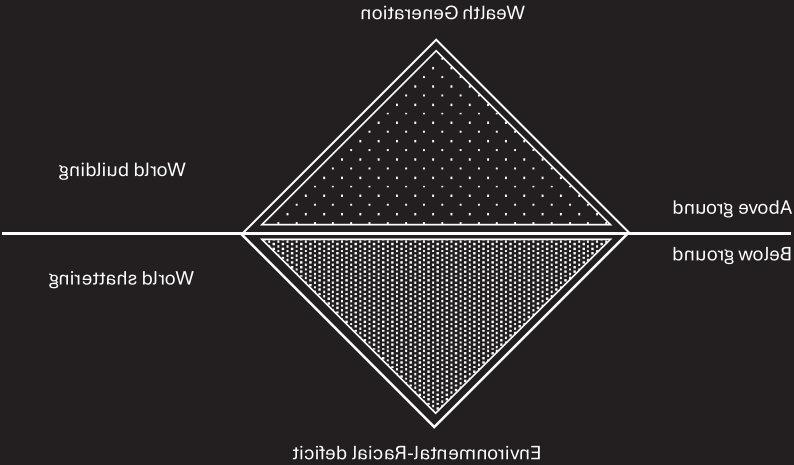


Figure 0.4
The planetary portal as a spatio-temporal pivot and Ponzi reversed.
Source: *Planetary Portals Collective*.

moment across disconnected geographies. By drawing attention to the racial and environmental debts of extraction and empire, the portal provides a disruptive method that pinches, pulls and rips at the idea of the 'planetary' as a smooth surface and which sets the conditions for imagining the uneven states of planetarity. In this way, the portal is a methodological prism that at once draws attention to the racial and environmental deficits of planetary extraction – the shadow architectures that reach from the 19th-century diamond mines to today's digital, data infrastructures – and offers a language of redress that opens alternative avenues for reimagining subject positions and human-environment relations within the long shadow of colonialism's continued presencing.

When mirror-massed against the dark underbelly of environmental depletion and racial exploitation, the generation of wealth from planetary mining operations and networked economies of extraction creates a portal between earthly undergrounds and overgrounds; a pivot that determines the vertical hierarchies of *who* and *what* is below and above ground and the uneven distribution (vertically as well as horizontally) of vulnerabilities and exposures. The planetary portal pivot in Figures 0.3 and 0.4 can be read like a floating iceberg, where the racial and environmental costs of colonial extraction are rendered opaque, almost invisible, obscuring the fact that the wealth generated through racial capitalism is not only directly mirrored but entirely outweighed by the deficit costs for racialised persons and environments. The pivot draws attention to the shadow architectures of debt, depletion and destruction that determine planetary conditions, and which don't just carry a footprint seemingly equally across the surface and through communities but reinforce global disparities in the present moment in the wake of colonialism (Sharpe 2016). In this way, the pivot replicates the structure of a Ponzi scheme: the generation of wealth through colonial extraction, relying on a capillary network that ties environments and bodies into exploitative debt relations. The pivot-Ponzi is suggestive of a re-reading of the historical narrativisation of Western modernity as a project of 'progress' and 'development' as totally reliant on violence perpetrated against the earth and Indigenous populations; it encourages us to understand contemporary global architectural and infrastructural innovations – from skyscrapers to data-labelling services, and from mines to the development and use of artificial intelligence – as delivering a promise of modern futurity, not *despite* the violence necessary for its production but *because* of it (see Brand 2020). By understanding the planetary portal as a Ponzi scheme, we refuse to look away from the horrors that underpin

and undergird the contemporary world, and which cannot be confined to the history books or the archives but which require a reckoning with their active resurfacing to reproduce global inequalities as a planetary condition in which we live (see also Chari 2024; Green 2020a).

When seen through the planetary portal, the mine is not just a hole in the ground but a porthole, an earthly portal that provides passage to another space-time of planetary alterity – as Spivak contends, ‘it contains us as much as it flings us away’ (Spivak 2003: 73). The holes we dig in the ground, Gavin Bridge suggests, not only produce distinct spaces of extraction and accumulation (mines, pits, collieries and so on) but also provide ‘conduits’ or ‘points of access’ to the layered depths of ‘compressed time,’ that is, minerals, coals, oils, gases and so on (see Bridge 2015, unpaginated para 5 and 13) and, we might add, connects us to the chequered histories of colonial time – the legacies of imperial extraction and exploitation. By digging through the depths of dark, earthly strata, access is granted to hidden reservoirs that upon discovery burst with what Timothy Mitchell (2011: 12) calls ‘buried sunshine’ or what Rihanna in her monster hit ‘Diamonds’ (2012) calls the compressed ‘energy of sun rays,’ while we become witness to the clamour of bodies and exhausted gasps of environments that are and have been exploited in the service and delivery of global extractive economies. In this way, digging (literally, metaphorically, archivally) involves spatio-temporal travel with carboniferous elements through geological and colonial times. Whether as coal or diamond, the alterity of covalent bonds between carbon atoms bind us to the dark recess of subterranean worlds, to prehistoric life forms and the pre-planetary moment of creation (Yusoff 2015). If the covalent bonds of diamonds were indeed created by the force of the ‘big bang,’ the origin story of diamonds is one of an eternal existence – from cosmic dust to planetary lust. The original De Beers advertising slogan for the engagement ring, ‘diamonds are forever,’ which remains the company tagline today, promotes the timeless quality of the diamond as the enduring symbol of love and union. As Shirley Bassey sings in ‘Diamonds Are Forever,’ the title song for the eponymous *James Bond* film, ‘I’ve no fear that they might desert me / Diamonds are forever.’ Digging for diamonds in South Africa (where diamondiferous rock was found in pipes extended deep into the earth) directs humans downwards, inwards, while also radiating outwards on an interstellar journey; evoking the fantasy of an elementary modality of co-habiting across planetary time and place (see Chapter 2, ‘Mimesis and Madness’). While this book is not exclusively about diamonds and refrains from providing an exhaustive, elemental history of the diamond, it does explore the material and historical legacies of diamond mining that connect 19th-century mining in South Africa

with the building and imagining of the modern world through infrastructural arrangements of rail, communication and data.

Diamonds are geologically defined as unique because their physical and optical properties are not found in any other 'natural' substance (apart from their allotrope, graphite). The hardness and durability of their covalent bond is what makes diamonds so useful as abrasive substances. By placing diamonds at the tip of drill bits, engineers have been able to drill through bedrock to ease the construction of subway systems and lay the foundations for high-rise buildings, forging a co-dependent relation between extractive industry and construction industries. As a pivot, the diamond allows us to imagine the hallmark of Western modernity, the skyscraper, as an 'inverted mine' (Brecht 1999) insofar that the technologies that enabled architects and engineers to build taller structures were developed in the mining industry to dig deeper into the mantle of the earth: whatever 'goes up' is mirror-massed in a network of subterranean voids – no volume comes from nowhere and always has a material, racial and social debt to pay (see Chapter 3, 'Apartheid Architectures').

During the Second World War, diamonds were put to use in the large-scale industrial production of firearms and navigation devices in aeroplanes, tanks and submarines. No global communication systems, elevator-serviced skyscrapers or subway networks are built without diamonds (see Roberts 2007). In addition, when rough diamonds are processed, cut and polished for gemstone markets, they lose up to 60 per cent of their weight, but the dust is not completely lost. When ground into a powder, diamond dust can be embedded in saw blades, drill bits and grinding wheels to enable cutting, drilling and grinding through the hardest and most durable materials. That is why roughly 80 per cent of diamonds that are mined today are used in the construction industry and medical science; they bore through bedrock or sheets of concrete like butter just as they grind down cavities and polish teeth into breathless brilliance.

They are not just rocks that grind, though. Diamonds capture light like no other element and reflect and refract it in ways that captivate humans, causing feverish lust for their sparkly lustre. The diamond delirium that drove prospectors deeper into the mines and fuelled the heteronormative desire to chain female bodies into patriarchal bondage has since diversified, sparking dreams of data storage and processing. By introducing 'impurities' into diamonds – a process known as 'doping' – diamonds can conduct electrical currents to produce a single photon, which if used in quantum computing can speed up data processing to out-compete current supercomputers with

150 million times faster speeds. And what is more, these single photons are emitted at room temperature, which removes the need to operate quantum computers in a total vacuum and at temperatures just above zero, making them easier and less costly to install and operate.

The extractive base of techno-utopian futures has ushered in a renewed scramble for African minerals and labour (see Chapter 5, 'Data Dreams'). This is a global scramble that now involves the competing desires of Chinese, Russian, European and North American interests, usually corporate (but often supported by militias or 'private security'), to survey, secure and extract the minerals required to build and compute the data infrastructures and devices connecting the world. At the edges of cities such as Nairobi, Kenya and Gulu, Uganda are office buildings and shipping containers refurbished to house annotative labourers, or labellers as they are informally known. Sponsored by contract organisations out of Silicon Valley, such as Sama AI, they offer annotative services to global technology companies. All pieces of data fed into machine learning algorithms require annotation and labelling that instructs on what the data is. In 2024, a group of Kenya-based annotative labellers won a court case claiming post-traumatic stress disorder because they had been hired by Sama AI to annotate Meta's (Facebook, Instagram) and Open AI's data that contained horrific depictions of beheadings, rape and bestiality, to point to all but a few of the traumas they were exposed to. There is no provenance for annotative labelling. Social media users are not made aware that the algorithms running to heighten their user experience and sketch their consumer profile use data that has been annotated and cleaned from their screens by someone, somewhere. Annotation is an interpretative act that in settling on what something means, what its 'real-world' referent is, enables the machine to render ontologies that in a hallucinogenic treatment erase the horrors that African digital workers are exposed to from the viewing deck of consumers in the wealthier markets of the Global North. This annotating and cleaning of data, much like polishing the diamond for consumption elsewhere, is necessitated by violence and dehumanisation in fulfilling the world-building, white-heat techno-dreams of those in the global tech industry.

While *Planetary Portals* takes the diamond as a material and analytical starting point, it does not develop a material historical account of its emergence as a commodity. Instead, we trace how the emergence of diamond mining in southern Africa, instigated through British colonial rule, reshaped geographies and propelled the residual environments into a future that is produced through the specific structural and speculative interventions that

scaffold onto these material histories. In five distinct chapters, we explore how these relations that tie geographies together across time take shape in the form of distinct materialities (bricks, tiles, earth, diamonds, gold, the engagement ring, crops, wood), infrastructures (railway, communication, farming, data) and spatialities (compounds, shebeens, huts, high-rise buildings, data centres).

Portal Perspectivism: A Reading Guide

The pivot in Figures 0.3 and 0.4 draws attention to the co-constitutive relation between different and opposing geographical imaginaries and anchors the analysis in empirical, socio-material transformations – from bricks to diamonds, from diamonds to data, from huts to the high-rise, and so on. It offers not a global theory of interconnected localities, materialities or events but instead a fractured – a portalled! – perspectivism that takes the reader on a deep journey with and through the carboniferous elements – coal, diamonds, bodies, buildings – through geological and colonial times. Each chapter homes in on specific sites where the diamond interfaces, in its distinct fractal dimensionality, to reveal portals that have transformed the socio-material relations of 19th-century South Africa in ways that linger on and shape the material conditions of life today.

SUCK: Chapter 1, ‘Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine’, theorises the portal through the vacuous *suck* of the subterranean space of the mine and its model compound in which mine labourers were forced to live. It takes the reader to Colesberg Kopje, the richest diamond mine at Kimberley in South Africa, also known as ‘The Big Hole’ due to its sheer size and depth, opening up the earth’s substratum like an exit wound. Drawing attention to the process of sending labourers into dangerous and compressed spaces underground, the chapter theorises the portal as *suction*, in the sense that it consumes the *bios* – labour, landscape, flora, fauna – and submits life forms to intense pressure in order to release minerals from their earthly embrace. The chapter shows how diamond extraction relied on an inhumane consumption of Black subjects as fungible bodies – confining, tearing and breaking Black bodies – in order for value, that is, diamonds, to rise from the ground and circulate on global markets. The oscillation between pressurising and depressurising is considered through the formation of the model compound that created prison-like conditions for workers; pressurised conditions that necessitated practices of depressurising in order to survive. Considering forms of “leisure” and bodily

expression, the chapter explores bare-knuckle boxing and dance not only as means of survival but as forms of insurgency against the tool-ification and dehumanisation of the mines, and as a practice by which miners sustained other forms of living.

SWIRL: A consequence of the pressure on the psyche of those working at the mine – both on mine workers who faced deathly conditions daily and prospectors who in volatile markets had to return investments – madness and suicide became a threat to the stability of extraction and value of the diamond. In Chapter 2, ‘Mimesis and Madness’, we develop the portal as a psychosexual *swirl*, in the sense that the decomposing suck is accompanied by a poisoning and muddying of the mind of miners. The chapter details how a series of bureaucratic architectures were put in place to fend off the swirling suck of the portal, relying on the gendered care of women in hospitals, bars and brothels to prevent mine workers from plunging into madness. By drawing attention to the psychosocial infrastructures of care, the chapter shows how women were crucial to the social reproduction of the mine, ensuring it could remain open for continuous extraction. With attention to the shebeen, the chapter also draws attention to insurgent forms of care that showcase the radical role of Black women who emerged as unlikely property owners and cultural providers within the mine complex, creating a space that quite literally lubricated the mine and bridged the geographies of migration.

BUILD: From the gravitational suck of the mine and the psychosexual swirl of the mining villages and towns, Chapter 3, ‘Apartheid Architectures’, considers the portal as a *built form*: a structure that rises above ground and exalts Western narratives of progress through the mobilisation of geology and architectonics along a vertical axis reaching upwards towards the sky. The chapter traces the historical fascination with the vernacular architectural form, the ‘primitive hut’, in Western architectural discourse and its mobilisation in 19th-century World Fairs and Exhibitions to provide a backdrop of ‘primitive’ simplicity against which towering steel and glass structures were staged to mark the architectural-cultural apex of imperial design and culture. Analytically, Chapter 3 echoes the mirror massing of above and below in Figures 0.3 and 0.4, by inviting the reader to consider how the materialisation of Western progress narratives in the modern skyscraper, lifting (Western) people and their aspirations off the ground and into the sky, relied on the counter-move of pushing other cultural formations and people into the ground. By dismantling the Western teleology of progress – materialised in the narrative from hut to high-rise – we follow Mbembe (2017)

in his *Critique of Black Reason* as he reverses or tilts modernity's centre of gravity towards Africa, drawing attention to the planetary 'community whose blood stains the entire surface of modernity' (2017: 29). With reference to the photographic experiments with huts and high-rises by South African photographers (Ernest Cole, Guy Tillim and Mark Lewis), the chapter develops an understanding of the hut as a cleavage or fissure in the Apartheid state that fractures contemporary racial hierarchies in vertical cityscapes. Thinking with the hut not as a psychic archetypal form to be replicated, revered or relegated to 'the primitive' but rather as a liminal, portalled perspectivism, the chapter reimagines how building worlds within the colonial present might insist on a present relation to the earth and belonging to the land, rather than expulsion from it.

EXTEND: Remaining above ground, Chapter 4, 'Red Lines, White Spots,' reaches from the urban core to connect settlements, mines and farms with ports through railway and telegraph infrastructures that develop the portal as a mode of *extension*. As a vital technology for colonisers to compress time and space, the portal of extension, the railway assemblage, was instilled to serve a more sinister purpose in facilitating the commodification of local populations as a source of labour that was herded around the continent to serve in the mining and agro-economies. The dream of a transcontinental railway dubbed the *The Thin Red Line* was conjured by British colonisers to connect the Cape Colony with Cairo, creating a fantasy of smooth, safe and comfortable travel, "taming" the continent. *The Thin Red Line* was a ploy to entice European investors, prospectors and settlers to take to the continent and recreate the pastoral idyll of the British landscape in Africa while making extraction easier, smoother and cheaper. Despite the challenges in securing sufficient financing meant it never reached completion – ultimately remaining a figment of an imperial fantasy – its piecemeal advance through southern Africa enabled colonial botany, agro-business and brick and tile making to refigure soil relations that readied the land for European settlement. The chapter shows how *The Thin Red Line* was a portal that made extraction, labour exploitation and farming possible in the colonial complex, pushing the landless Black South Africans into townships while enabling the white settlers to prosper in depopulated lands and leafy suburbs: *The Thin Red Line* readied the continent to be covered in *White Spots*.

DREAM: While Chapter 4 demonstrates that despite never reaching completion, *The Thin Red Line's* promise of transformation by bifurcation endured in the facilitation of white settlement, Chapter 5, 'Data Dreams,' opens the portal to contemporary advances of digital infrastructures and the

future imaginaries of AI for Africa that operate at the continental scale, mirroring Rhodes's continental dreaming to claim Africa as an entity interned in control and ownership of land and mineral resources. The chapter focuses on how data emerges as the new mine ecology that instantiates the same earth relations of extraction and exploitation to support the seamless surface appearance of AI as a future technology, which in Africa is configured within the redemptive-development narratives of colonial administration, the discourses of international development and the philanthropy of Silicon Valley tech companies. Africa is reinvented as emerging from the shadows to benefit from the leap to the Fourth Industrial Revolution. While new futures are being narrated, the undersea fibre-optic pipelines that promise to connect Africa to the rest of the world run along the very same route of colonial infrastructural remains, utilising them today in a move that busts the myth of the 'disconnected' African continent but also sediments the imperial geographies of AI and data infrastructures in their expansion across and out of Africa. The chapter draws on illustrations from recent controversies around ghost labour, pipelines and the ethics of AI to argue that the world-building aspirations of AI centre on reproducing white supremacy, reflecting the authoritarian leanings of Big Tech as the epistemological base of machine learning and large language models (LLMs). In this way, the chapter establishes the AI archive as the method in which AI builds an earth and social memory that identifies, interprets and calculates reality from within the epistemological frames of white, heteronormative patriarchy.

Finally, in the 'Conclusion: Diamond Power!', we bring together the portal as a praxis for doing geographical and archival work. We return to the main concern of the book, which is to ask that when statues come down what remains? To apprehend the infrastructures of value regulation that continue to reinscribe space with its imaginaries and extractive demands in the wake of 'rename and reclaim' campaigns, this book proposes the portal as a concept, a method and an analytical approach to think through the planetary relations that shape the condition of environmental life and knowledge economies today. The conclusion draws attention to the ways that the portal, across each chapter, is developed progressively to expose how changes of state in the material flows and environmental conditions that define the extractive context of planetary relation shape planetary conditions of life that reach from a colonial past into the future. Through its *suck* and *swirl*, its *building* and *extension*, the book shows how planetary portals organise time and space with varying degrees of intensity and moments of acceleration and slowing down, taking material form in concrete rearrangements of environments and geographies.

But we also draw attention to other, more localised portals that take form as resistances and open into different weathers of the imagination. With reference to an exhibition organised by the authors at The Photographers' Gallery in London, 2025, the conclusion ends by considering how the mode of non-speculative fiction developed throughout the book offers a language for furthering epistemic repair in the colonial present.

A Planetary Theory of Epistemic Repair (of Environments for Subjects)

Returning to Equation 1 of the colonial portal, we want to foreground the environment as the condition of subjectivity rather than understanding subjects outside of their emergence and disassembly in relation to environments (as land, matter, belonging, light, agronomy etc.). As critical archival practices have long emphasised, attention to dehumanising effects is a crucial component of epistemic practice, but often what is left unattended is the environmental context and relation in which epistemic repair takes place (all that is backgrounded or contracted into the colonial portal of dreams made through the negative operation of racial value). The portal is a way to understand the pervasiveness of dominant geographical modes of apprehension that shape relations with the earth and its transformation. If we understand colonialism as a chronogeographical cut that severed temporal lines of environmental knowledge (understood as an archive of philosophy and practice that secured reciprocal earth-subject relations), then the practice of anti-colonial environmental praxis *requires* repair to these environmental and epistemic cuts. The representation and articulation of the environment in extractive practices, its configuration in entities and modalities of containment and consolidation, are all implicated in the continuation of colonial apartheid (understood through the severance of subjects as entities that are apart from specific earth-based relations).

The imperative to repair the severed ties between bodies and environments takes inspiration from decolonial and abolitionist thinking in critical Black and feminist scholarship that, as Dionne Brand proposes, engages in storytelling as a practice of 'mirroring and correcting or mirroring to correct' (2020: 37). As a form of analytical pivot, mirroring-to-correct equips us to represent archival records, intervene in their representative medium, stretch their interpretation and extend their boundaries through speculative non-fiction (see the discussion later in this section) to illuminate absence,

silence and cultural obfuscation. It meets the challenge of decentring colonial narratives by exposing the violent horrors of colonialism (its *suck* and *swirl*, its *extension* and *building*) and producing alternative narratives for liberation and epistemic reparation (boxing, dancing, idling, queering, scheming, plotting, sleeping). The approach employs an interrogation of archival silences (Azoulay 2008; Carby 2019; Hartman 2018, 2019) and engages modalities of recentering marginalised voices (Bajorek 2017; Canham 2023; Morrison 1992; Sealey 2018) to experiment with how erasures (in the archive as well as lived environments) can be activated in the service of reparation. The conceptual framework also draws inspiration from the colonial ‘unlearning’ that frames liberatory reimaginings of African epistemologies (Canham 2023; Canham and Seedat 2025; Chari 2024; Green 2020b; Mohulatsi 2023; Wynberg 2024) and speculative fiction (Butler 1979; Jemisin 2020; Whitehead 2016) to retell and renarrate life in the Anthropocene as a way of nurturing epistemic reparations.

Analytically, the portal can be apprehended as a tool both to *detect* ongoing colonial geographical imaginations and to *retool* hidden, silenced and subjected imaginations that are sutured to land relations, environmental conditions and the sense of a reciprocity with the earth. Imagination is a technology of capture, containment and temporal narration that sets geographical coordinates, which *cartographise* the future and how it comes into being. Colonial geographical imaginations have been defined through a logic of theft and cartographies of extraction that operate across subjects and earth, with little regard for the maintenance of existing formations and life-worlds. There is no going back to a time, state or condition *before* colonialism, nor is the hegemony of colonial capture a replete and inexorable force, but colonialism-after-colonialism enacts a fractured continuum of extraction that is reproduced at the level of epistemic objects, practices and subjects. While the basis of subject rights and autonomy have shifted in the context of UK-South Africa relations and through the internal politics of South Africa, the fundamental discontinuation between earth and subjects has remained live, kept open by the languages and financial centres of extraction that operate as a portal in maintaining older relations and epistemic objects of coloniality.

Epistemic reparations for planetary repair require first asking: How does the earth appear in these colonial archives? In what relation does it get scripted, utilised, embodied and performed? Beyond the necessary call for land rights there is a need for a reconstituted re-earthing of the subject through geographical imaginations that produce speculative non-fictional accounts of environments imagined in resistance to the suck of colonial

abstractions. Against the spatial project of consolidation of the earth, now planet, into a homogeneity of extraction (that builds its empire with specific containment of epistemic entities), opening portals to epistemic difference is a way to both defang the colonial geographical imagination of its temporal mastery and engage timelines cut short by the process of 'making landless' as the precondition of exploitation. Thus, we can think of the portal as both a mode of analysis and a mode of reconnection that sutures together that which is cut off through colonial production and reproduction of epistemic objects of extracted earth. *Re-enacting to reactivate* reverses the flow of colonial geographical imaginaries and their modes of contraction over people and place.

A Planetary Methodology for Epistemic Repair (of Environments)

Returning to Equation 2, shredding the portal, we see epistemic repair of environmental conditions of being and becoming as crucial to establishing just and decolonial earths. Alongside work on subjective reconfiguration, we see the contours of subjectivity as residing in conjoined environmental conditions, which requires displacing subjective focus to understand how the environment co-constitutes the dimensions of what subjectivity can be and become. This pivot exists alongside an understanding of a model of the planetary that often displaces subjects in favour of totality. Epistemic repair to subjectivity requires a coupled repair to environments through co-constituted states of being, tracing how land/environment/place 'holds' the knots of subjectivity as a possible actualisation and is held by the land as a geography of relation. In order to open portals of epistemic difference and planetary alterity, *Planetary Portals* develops a methodological framework that revisits archival materials and deconstructs their ability to script land and people within it to create different environments, different worlds – planetary alterities that can hold the injured and injurious bodies in a reparative embrace.

Rather than writing portals through reimaginings of subjectivity within pre-existing environments, which merely ends up reproducing the same body-environment relations, the portal methodology offers a new tool of imagination. Not confined by technologies of the imagination – role play, digital technologies, architectures, maps, and so on – the portal mobilises archival records, photographs and speculative non-fictions to produce new environmental imaginings. By employing three distinct methods – archival research, visual and photographic analysis and the use of speculative non-fiction – reimagining through the portal is a way of rescripting body-earth

relations within the chronogeographical suck of neo/post/pre-colonialism, and a way to open up the portal for ways of reimagining planetary being along other axes. The three-pronged portal methodology not only critically engages with and exposes the evidentiary base of colonial imaginaries (mirroring) but engages speculative non-fiction in order to develop new imaginaries for ulterior being (correcting).

Archive

From the outset, colonial archives impose a limitation on the epistemic possibilities of the evidence found in the archive and their ability to report on or describe historical events and earth conditions outside of extraction (see Fuentes 2016; Hartman 2016; Johnson 2018; Morgan 2016; Smallwood 2016). Imperial archives and administrative historicities hold the materials of the colonists: the letters, ledgers and books they found worthy of keeping, and which they gave importance to their project of colonising lands and people. The official archive provides not only a partial view but a wholeheartedly distorted view of the world that in the same breath as it normalises violence and neutralises harm (see Green 2020a), it erases the voices and places of those who are subjugated and subject to colonial violence. When engaging critically with colonial archives, it is therefore necessary to employ a systematic process and robust methodology that both selects historical artefacts and materials as evidence of the distorted colonial gaze of the world while drawing attention to the erasures in these materials – and doing so by drawing upon alternative archival holdings and marginal and localised archives. To do so, we find inspiration in the work of decolonial and Black feminist scholars who engage with archives as a mode of epistemic repair (see Carby 2019; Hartman 2019) and propose three stages of archival research.

First, we work with the grain of historical records enacting a retelling of historical events as they occur both in archival records and as recounted in historical source materials. Reading with the grain of the archive implies the selective use of archival sources to explain and describe the historical relations that shape the conditions of colonisation, but with a focus on developing a critical approach to the ways that materials can expose rather than reproduce the colonial narrative and storytelling. In this way, reading with the grain does not mean that the research uncritically pays lip-service to the agents of empire but, rather, treats archival materials as evidence of partial narratives written by those in power.

Second, by drawing closer attention to the partiality of colonial archives, we read against the grain of the colonial record, by which we mean exposing the mechanisms and intentionality of the archive in actively silencing voices and erasing accounts from subjugated people to craft instead a distorted account of historical events. By collecting and collating material evidence of the violences of archival erasures, reading against the grain aims to expose mechanisms of power and reveal and foreground other stories, experiences, ideas and accounts. The aim of reading against the grain is to draw a fuller account of lives that are lived within and against the archival record and thus challenge the power asymmetries of a historicity that refuses the earth as relation. By amplifying and multiplying accounts of alternate lifeworlds and other ways of inhabiting land and space, the aim is to create environments where erasure becomes a mode of reconstituting environments as relational.

In conversation with Saidiya Hartman's 'critical fabulation' (Hartman 2008: 11), a method of speculative writing and historical storying of the lives of a Black women imagined beyond the scant regard and the punishing possibilities of the archive, we employ speculative non-fiction as a way to tell geographies that write into the space of environments, both in the traces of its transformation as an empirical, epistemic and lived materiality and to imagine it as a conjoined subjective-environmental state beyond settler extractivism. Hartman suggests that '[b]y advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research, and by that I mean a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history' (Hartman 2008: 11), a zone of experience that 'cannot be verified' is situated in which 'to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance' (2008: 12). Hartman's speculative, 'impossible' writing does the work of environmental restitution as a crucial dimension of livingness and a site of on-going colonial violence. By employing the term 'speculative non-fiction', we seek to address how geographical imaginaries of the environment function as a crucial medium of control in the diminishment and disregard of life – both within the lived experience of colonial afterlives and archival records. The term 'speculative' denotes the critical examination of the role of speculation in mobilising environmental transformation and opens up the forms of non-fictional telling that might take place through an attentiveness to what is backgrounded in archives, texts and photographs; that which is narrated as simply the environmental context of interventions and transformations, rather than the active space in which the possibilities of

life, as a collective condition that is indivisible from environmental existence, are made possible or not. Refusing the isolation of the colonial subject and its forms of mastery, speculative non-fiction is a way to begin to narrate an environmental and planetary being (Holden, Yusoff, and Ebbensgaard 2026).

Photography

we are all tied to England, and England to the imagination. (Brand 2020: 5)

Brand's reflection of the ties of Empire is made on the occasion of a family photograph taken when she, as a child, was growing up in Trinidad and Tobago, to be sent to her mother and aunt who had migrated to England. The photograph, she contends, reveals that 'England is in the air at home' (Brand 2020: 4), both in the addressed – her relatives who are located 'abroad', *in* England – and in the addressee, who must pose, who must 'make a good appearance' (Brand 2020: 4) *before* England. England is tied to the colonial imaginary that like a spectre haunts geographies across the planet and across time. In this way, Brand's family portrait becomes a device, an evidentiary base from where the colonial ties of the imaginary – of *England!* – locks people into relation, ties them into the colonial imaginary that is England, 'away' and at 'home.' But it is also open to other interpretations, to other ways of scripting relation.

The photograph is a portal that on the one hand reveals how England as a colonial project is always 'away' and at 'home,' just as it is always in the past and in the present, shaping the future. The photograph reveals 'an attempt' by Brand and her family members 'to "appear," to synchronise with coloniality's time of modernity, of proper subjectivity' (Brand 2020: 8). On the other hand, it reveals a way of relating to colonial pasts and presents that destabilises the very mechanisms of appearance, questioning the synthesised process of appearance that produces a 'porous portrait [that] is full of multiple autobiographies' (Brand 2020: 7). By engaging with archival photographs – that in this case are autobiographical – Brand both exposes how the 'violent trajectories [of colonialism] have been synthesised in the photograph' (2020: 7–8) and mobilises the photograph to loosen the colonial ties in an attempt to rewrite relation.

The analytical move is in many ways similar to how Mark Sealey in *Decolonising the Camera* seeks to decolonise photography by 'unburdening it from the assumed, normative, hegemonic, colonial conditions present,

consciously or unconsciously, in the moment of its original making and in its readings and displays' (2018: 2). Yet, the act of unburdening photography from the colonial conditions that shaped its existence never turn away from the colonial moment but instead insists on its taking place 'within and against the political and violent reality of Western imperialism' (Sealey 2018: 1). *Planetary Portals* considers the violent yet sanitised and synthesised reality of British Imperialism as a historical fact that reveals itself in the colonial archive and in particular in the photographs that were taken with the intention not only of documenting British advancement and progress in its colonial project, but to advertise its enterprise to and garner support (for speculative capital) from potential political allies, financial advisors and investors and contractors in England. By engaging critically with the narrative of the colonial gaze in archival photographs, we propose a three stepped process of (1) decolonising, (2) de-centring and (3) environmentalising archival imagery and photography.

First, taking inspiration from Sealey's (2018) call to unburden photographs of their colonial gaze and Brand's (2020) opening of photographs to the porous portraits of multiple autobiographies that both align and collide with colonial narratives, the act of decolonising photography is an attempt to reveal and reverse the gaze. Who is being photographed (the addressee), for whose consumption (the addressed)? And who becomes an unwilling subject to perform a role that is hidden or buried in the address? By posing these questions, *Planetary Portals* critically engages with colonial photographs as an act of questioning the intentionality of their production – how they are riddled with an 'air of England' – and points towards the limits of their attempt to eternalise the ties that bind people and land in colonial imaginary. By critically assessing the gaze and the composition of people and land within the photograph, we seek to challenge how the colonial gaze naturalised body–environment relations in ways that neutralise their violent work on both bodies and land and the geographies that hold them in relation.

Second, we take inspiration from Hartman's (2008, 2019) inventive use of critical fabulation that she develops in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* and Tina Campt's (2017) meticulous method of *Listening to Images*. Through her interrogation of archival silences, Hartman engages with the disturbing violences of photographs, ledgers and police reports to 'glimpse the terrible beauty of wayward lives,' with the aim of 'articulat[ing] another kind of existence, a runaway image that conveys the riot inside' (2019: 30). Hartman's quest in the archives was driven by a hunger for 'images that represented

the experiments in freedom that unfolded within slavery's shadow, the practice of everyday life and *escape subsistence*' (2019: 17; emphasis in the original text). The subsistence that the riotous and wayward women relied on was their own means of escape, which becomes the focal point for Hartman to critically fabulate on their desirous drives that are occluded from archival records. The attention to whispers in the image shares with Tina Campt an aim to explore how we might become attuned to hearing the murmurs and utterances of the negative spaces and the durational possibilities for repetition and amplification out of colonial time.

In the archival materials used for this book, we search the margins of attention within colonial photographs, often those who did not stop and pose and therefore instead appear as a faint blur or smudge on the negative. In these marginal spaces of colonial photography, portals are opened that de-centre the hegemony of the colonial gaze and which challenge the imposition of visual race hierarchies within the image. Shadows, blurs and the traces of decay that time marks upon archival materials are, however, not absences void of information. Rather, as Teju Cole remarks in *Blind Spot*, 'Darkness is not empty. It is information at rest' (2016: 153) and equally, in these marginal spaces, there are the fleeting glimmers of life that occupy the fragmented narratives of the archive's alterity. As Hartman suggests, in these fragmented records we might trace the 'dreams of what might be possible if you could escape the house of bondage' (2019: 17). Or, as Sealey argues with reference to his critical engagement with post-colonial African photography, it is in their de-centred re-reading that we might build 'a context in which different knowledge can surface out of the past, brings forth numerous possible narratives in the present' (2018: 175).

Third, and in an extension of the move to de-centre the gaze and draw attention to the possibilities of alterity living full lives within the marginal spaces of the photograph, we aim to re-environmentalise images and landscapes with the hitherto erased noise of subjective-environmental relating. By this we do not claim to give voice to the silenced or to fabulate on experiences that we have no way of knowing. Instead, we draw attention to the lives unmentioned and unseen by the colonial gaze, the other lives of subjects and re/sisters who while clearly subject to the violence of empire are not overdetermined by it, allowing a space of paucity to reflect upon the possibilities of what life might also have been like, which is not captured in the colonial gaze of the archive (or is so, incidentally). It is in this way that critical fabulation becomes a powerful tool not of fabrication but of drawing attention towards possible narratives, ideas and environmental lifeworlds

that refuse to be defined by the inexorable force of colonial scripture. And more importantly, it enables a way of representing historical evidence from archival records that renders violence of colonialism palpable but without contributing to colonialists' or slave masters' *jouissance* of reproducing that very same violence – it opens ways of engaging in an encounter with the wider environments that constitute the psychologically scarring effects of colonial violence as it is transmuted through the portal, to point towards how to build environments differently.

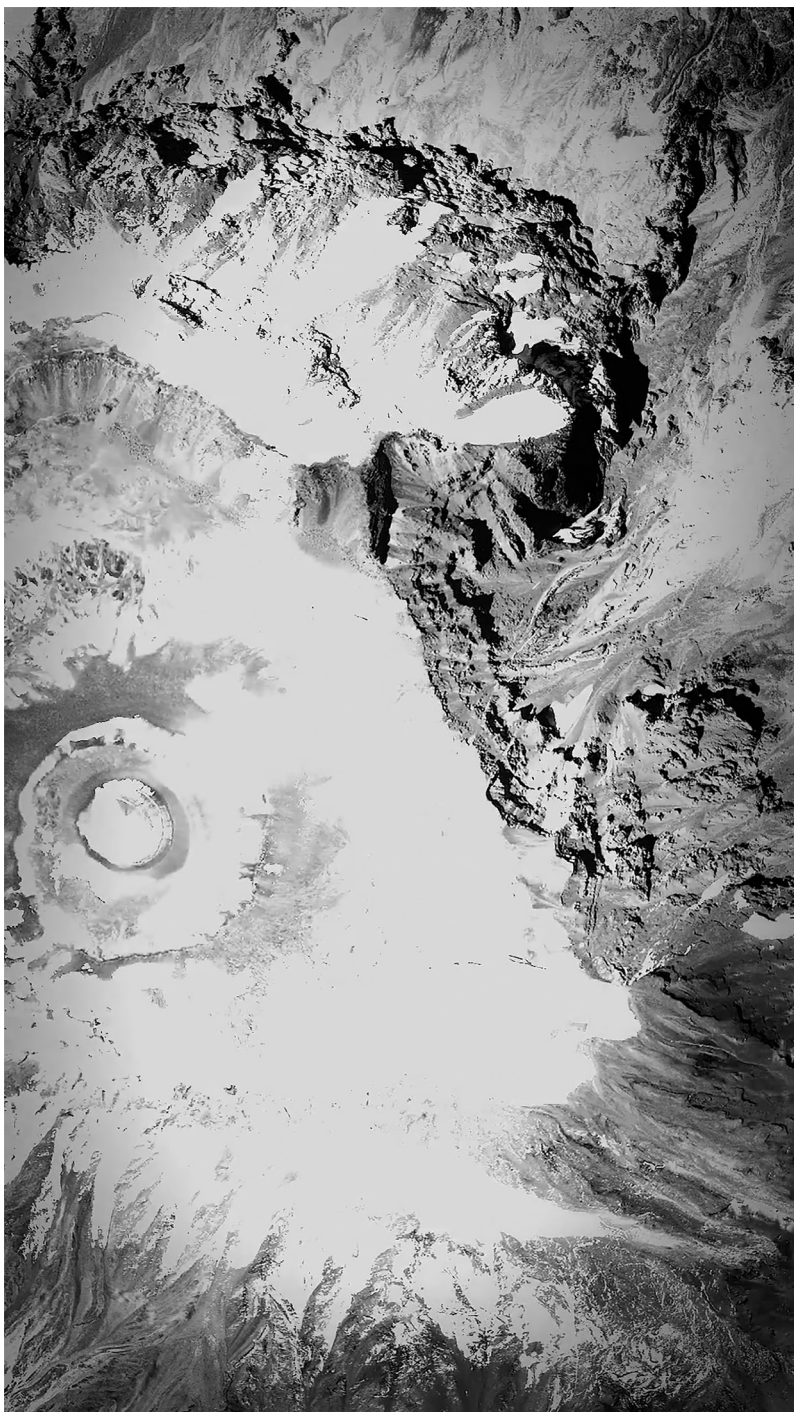
Speculative Non-fiction

While the analytical focus on photography as both evidence of a waxed colonial imagination of the world and a potential site for reimagining and rendering possible other ways of inhabiting colonial space and time, gesturing towards other, alternate futures, photographs also have their clear limits. For Hartman, the photograph is limiting and, as she reflects, 'I had to move beyond the photograph and find another path' (2019: 30) for her wayward women who would not be tied down by the flattening representation of their buoyancy to a still life. They needed other registers to give full accounts of their lives. To do this, Hartman draws together a wide range of archival sources, interviews and accounts that enable her to piece together historical contextual evidence within which the speculative dimensions of her work can breathe life into the partial records and dehumanising accords to suggest another quiet but unruly revolution taking place. In this way, she engages in an innovative approach to speculating through non-fictive evidential accounts.

Planetary Portals invests in 'responsible imaginings' (to paraphrase African American sci-fi writer N. K. Jemisin's quip about the need for responsible narrative futurities that include more than white male subjects) that we call 'speculative non-fiction,' which is a method for making visible what is known but excluded by white heteropatriarchal accounts that normalise certain perspectives and theories about environmental histories and the lives they make possible (or not). The speculative refers *not* to what is 'unknown' but to what is marginalised from normative perspectives of white 'hereness' and how its extractive practices organise environments to silence voices and relational inhabitations through the radical transformation of those environments. Acknowledging that theory emerges from particular geographies of power and colonial imaginaries, and is normalised from there into the

universal, speculative non-fiction offers a way to examine and reimagine what was and what could be in environmental futures and the lives that can land there.

Throughout each of the chapters, we engage speculative writing in order to account for the potentiality of full lives of bodies and earths taking place within and against the long shadows of colonialism, while examining the fictive role of geographical imaginations to shape the materiality of worlds. From colonial photographs to ledgers and accounts, and from surveyor maps to diaries and unofficial reports, the archival materials are pierced with absences and erasures, mimicry and defiance, imprinting a speculative realism onto the imaginary orders, suggesting that here, even within the tight reins of colonial attempts at capture, other worlds are present and actively engaged in ways of making environmental life. In response to each material collected and selected from the colonial archive, we have composed speculative texts that tear into the shadow space opened up between the white supremacist logics of photographic scripts and its bureaucratic accounting and the lives that unfolded alongside them, within them, against them, despite them, to evoke other dreams and other worlds not captured in the colonial dream. Throughout the chapters, these texts are woven into the main body, working against the severing tides that in colonial archival materials cut the relation between subjects, bodies and the environment. In speculative non-fiction we work towards a recognition of the tense and impermanent historical legacies that tie together human subjects, indivisibly, as geographical and environmental beings, contra to colonial cartographies.



1

Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine

Diamond Fever

Looking at pictures of the Kimberley diamond mine, the inverse geography of extraction's vertiginous minescape, has all the geophysics of fever and its imaginative engulfment.¹ As seen in Figure 1.1, the aerial view of the gaping hole exposes a chaotic structure of engineered geology, a stratification of the ground in square mounds, almost resembling buildings, and all



Figure 1.1

The Kimberley Mine as it was in 1874. Source: The papers of Sir George Farrar at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. 2175 Box 1.

¹ The title of this chapter plays on the double meaning of 'mine,' both as a noun and possessive term, and references its use by Toni Morrison in the possessive in *Beloved*; in a song in the Walt Disney film *Pocahontas* about 'discovery'; Kathryn Yusoff's use in relation to the mine as a paradigm of material dispossession as racial control; and Uhuru Portia Phalafala's collection of poetry entitled, *Mine, Mine, Mine*.

connected by a spider web of wires that reach across the scene connecting each mound to windlasses at the rim. It is a technological complex that haunts with an eerie, almost hellish quality to reveal a most chaotic scene of facsimile modernity – an inverse tale of modernity; the background necessary for modernity (and its fore-grounding) to arise (see Figure I.3). Only four years prior, this very landscape was but a field, only to be dug by hand, using pickaxes and shovels, to burrow the landscape in parcels measuring 9 by 9 m, also known as claims.

The first diamond ‘fever’ that arrived at Kimberley in 1870 was motivated by the discovery of large and plentiful rough diamonds. The Cape government quickly annexed the land and administered claims, and prospective diggers flooded the fields, pitching tents and procuring tools while betting on which and how many claims to acquire. When miners initially hit the hard layer of volcanic, kimberlite rock, which due to its magnesium-rich composition appeared blueish grey, they thought it was the end of diamond deposits and turned to other claims, moving horizontally across the ground. Yet, others, who ventured through the ‘blue rock’ soon discovered that the richest deposits appeared with the stubborn kimberlite, giving its name to the village (for a cross-section of the Kimberley Mine, revealing the stratal appearance of blue rock, see Figure 1.2).

While the European population at the time was scattered across the Cape Colony, 2,000 European diggers were based across the mines at Kimberley by 1870, and by 1872, more than 5,000 independent diggers had purchased claims in the pits (‘One who has visited the fields’ 1872). The wealth ‘fever’ also drew Black miners and labourers to the fields, with more than 50,000 arriving each year, mostly on foot, from as far as Pediland, more than 500 miles away, from Tsonga almost 1,000 miles away, and drawing in Zulus from Natal and ‘Moshoeshoes’ from Basutoland. Arriving at Kimberley, Black diggers could take their pick between the many miners who unwittingly found themselves locked in competition not only to strike into a diamond-bearing pipe but to secure sufficient labour to keep digging (Meredith 2007).²

Faced with rising costs of labour and an unpredictable supply of rough diamonds that tended to come in waves rather than in a steady stream, miners struggled to cover their costs and many felt the threat of bankruptcy, leading to

² The pipe formation in South Africa made it unusual and given the concentration in one place, this geology facilitated South Africa becoming the world’s primary diamond producer, overtaking Brazil and India.

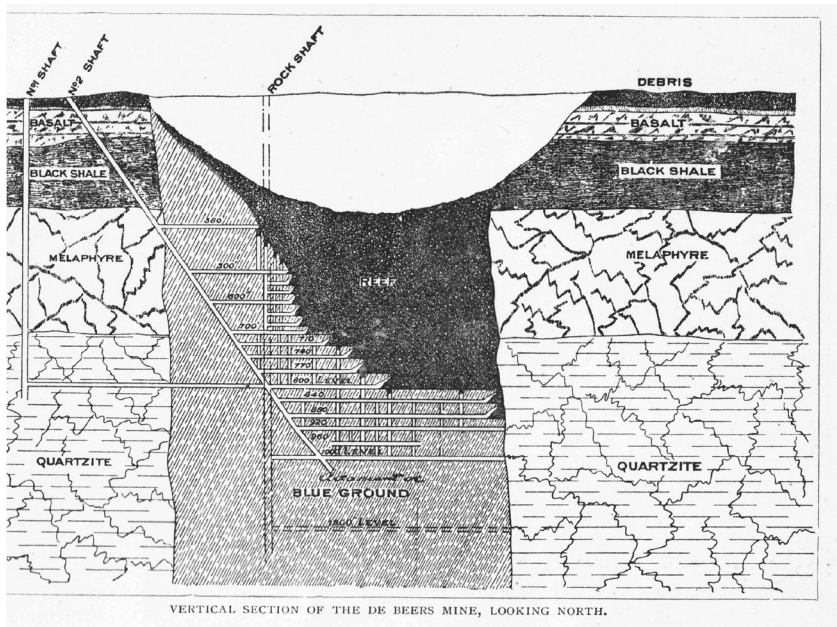


Figure 1.2

Diamond mining in South Africa: vertical section of the De Beers mine, looking north. Source: unknown.

a widespread madness gripping the mining communities that had settled above the pit, edging onto the mine (see Chapter 2, 'Mimesis and Madness'). Diamond digging was a highly unpredictable enterprise and the volatility of the markets added to the challenges for miners. During the first decade of active mining the claims (licensed by British administrators), miners faced a short supply of adequate digging equipment, a constant threat of flooding from torrential rain and rising groundwater, and insufficient road infrastructures that as the miners went deeper into the ground it started collapsing around them. To overcome the structural problems of the mine, engineers and diggers from across the world, including Cornwall and Australia, migrated to erect an elaborate system of timber stagings around the edges of the mine, linking claims by rope to a system of cable transports. With diggers burrowing their claims at varying speeds and depths, the mine developed into a chequered landscape of square mounds, stacked against each other at varying heights, resembling, in an uncanny, almost haunting way the dense urban skyline of Western metropolises such as London, Berlin or New York, but in ruinous form (see Chapter 3, 'Architectures

of Apartheid'). Each claim was connected by hauling ropes, attached to windlasses around the edge, lifting buckets up from the individual claims and, later, an array of cable cars and pulleys that all traversed the pit. By 1874, 1,000 windlasses connected hauling ropes across the mine at Kimberley:

So thickly together were these lines set that the whole face of the vast pit seemed to be covered by a monstrous cobweb, shining in the moonlight as if every filament was a silver strand ... Hide buckets were flying like shuttles in a loom up and down the vast warp of wires, twanging like dissonant harp-strings, with a deafening din of rattling wheels and falling ground. (Meredith 2007: 38)

With the gradual optimisation and effectivisation of mining operations, the production of diamonds accelerated at a speed that caused dramatic fluctuations on the markets. When diggers stuck the rich diamond-bearing pipes, they flooded the markets with piles of rough diamonds, causing prices to plummet and forcing the markets to crash completely in 1872, 1873 and 1876 (and again in 1882 and 1885) (see Meredith 2007). While the engineering of the ground stabilised work in the mine, mine operators lacked the necessary capital to absorb these fluctuations, remaining vulnerable to market shifts and threatened by bankruptcy and closure. Rather than blaming the market, however, white miners unions grew throughout the 1870s and raised concerns about what they perceived to be a growing threat: Black ownership over claims and Black labour demands. In a letter published in the newspaper *Diamond News* in 1872, the Colonial Secretary A. F. Lindley states that:

It would be almost impossible for white men to compete with natives as diggers; the mere difference between their living expenses ... the need to perform a certain standard of living becomes an obstacle to a profitable extraction of resources. (Lindley quoted in Green 2020a: 90–91)

Black life in the mine was both necessary for white miners to operate the mines at all (digging, hauling, sorting, transporting etc.) and 'an obstacle to a profitable extraction' of diamonds to take place, which led to the unions lobbying for the limitation and restriction of Black ownership (pass laws, the Glen Grey Act 1894, the Mines and Works Act 1911, the Natives Land Act 1913).

By 1881, Kimberley experienced a second bout of diamond fever. While a change in legislation in 1876 had led to the consolidation of a few claims within the ownership of one person or company, ownership of claims was

still largely restricted to individuals. In 1881, the introduction of a new system that included the formation of a host of joint-stock companies in the diamond fields invited a rush of investors in a scramble for control and power: 'speculators thronged the main diamond market in Ebdon Street in Kimberley, where a new stock exchange was established to accommodate the huge increase in business' (Meredith 2007: 107). The change in regulation of claim ownership paved the way for corporate entrepreneurs to take hold of the mine, which led to widespread 'speculative mania' (Meredith 2007: 110) where claims were bought on credit for prices far exceeding their value, falling slowly under the ownership of few.

It was during this time that Cecil Rhodes established himself as a prospecting entrepreneur at Kimberley, having explored different ventures with varying degrees of success – from procuring an ice-cream machine to sell to the miners to winning the pumping contract to drain the pits of water – before buying up and controlling claims. Under the aegis of what became De Beers, he aggressively started buying up claims of competing companies, gaining controlling shares in competing companies and mines that effectively enabled him to start a slow process of consolidation. Consolidation was not simply a way of gaining more power over mining operations; it was pursued by Rhodes as a *panacea* to the twinned challenges of stabilising profit (through the equation of race and value) – settling the boom and bust swings that had plagued diamond prospecting – and answering the 'native question' by racialising mine labour. Consolidation meant an effective monopolisation over the extraction of diamonds and control over their distribution and valuation on global markets. As the single owner of the Kimberley mines from 1888, De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd determined the value of diamonds by limiting their supply and creating an archive of rough diamonds that is still being released today. Disciplining the diamond rock also meant disciplining and securitising the space of the mine, effectively transforming it into a closed compound that exercised tighter control over the supply and control of labour. Mine labour was viewed as a threat, through theft and illegal trade, that was policed through invasive bodily searches and medical examinations, as well as the administrative surveillance and licensing of the compound population. The result was not only bureaucratic oversight but a transformation of the mine into a closed compound: 'a material structure that can be read as a condensation of anxieties about ownership,' an architectural complex that was a direct 'response to diamond smuggling and the panic about illicit diamond buying' (Green 2020a: 89).

By 1885, the major mining companies began to experiment with underground mining operations, constructing shafts and tunnels that allowed them to reach deep-level deposits and conduct subterranean digging. The capital necessary to venture below ground further limited the future of diamond mining to the major corporations, which by 1886 had been bought up entirely by Rhodes through De Beers. When Rhodes later in 1886 was appointed chairman of De Beers, he effectively exercised a complete monopoly over mining operations at Kimberley and controlled 90 per cent of global diamond production. It is in this phase of the history of diamond mining in South Africa that the formation of De Beers exceeds a mere mining corporation: 'the company was created in the image of a state ... a successor to the East India Company ... [a] pretext and ground for the extension of corporate power into public space. The enclosed world of the mine and its compound rearrange the world outside the mine' (Green 2020a: 87).

By turning the ground upside down, by burrowing deeper into the earth's blueish mantle to wrestle rough diamonds out of its grasp and float them on global markets, the mine created a portal that ordered race and value in a hierarchy of above and below. Morris notes that this weight of value above and below landed squarely in the miner's body, by weighing miners before and after going down the mine (Morris in Morris and Kentridge 2021: 142). If race was the 'obstacle to a profitable extraction of resources' (Lindley quoted in Green 2020a: 90–91), the monopolisation of diamond mining through consolidation and the securitisation of its production through establishing closed-compound systems, modelled on the convict-lease labour prisons, charted a value economy that, like the planetary portal pivot, tottered on a racial hierarchy of above and below.

Above and Below

It might be said, without any stretch of the imagery, that the modern Kimberley is literally as well as essentially built up on the yield of the mines. (Williams [1902] 2011: 450)

To be relegated underground is to be denied a life on the surface. It is to live in the sharp end of the pyramid portal with diminishing returns and contracting horizons (as well as lungs). Diamond mines enabled the building of cities and thickened the density of relations in racial hierarchies that became foundational to the creation of forms of valuation tied to geological materials and minerals in Africa. The division between 'above' ground and 'underground' in

Figure 1.3 reveals the partition of racialised earths, which can be understood as the dynamic of surfacing and hierarchising value as a geophysical event (of pressure, contraction, gravity and race). This racialised surfacing of diamond value, from below to above, in turn means understanding the consolidation of the mine as a portal of material and subjective transformation, where the spatiality of the mine ricochets through subjective relation as an expansion or contraction of the demand for diamonds; one that demonstrates the inverted racial minescape of the diamond as a portal that shows the suck of predatory whiteness (and thus the production of race and racialised entities, along with the management of subjective life, sexuality, sociality and bodily integrity); and as contingent on the mobilisation of geological matter as value. In 1897 De Beers mines put that racial apartheid of space bluntly, as above and below, whites and Blacks.

Above and below posits the proportion of Black and white bodies in relation to the ground and the dynamics of racial management. For every white at the mine nearly five Black people toil, both above and below ground. In total numbers, white workers are doubled above ground (1,126/500), while Black workers remain almost constant (3,528/3,812), creating

EMPLOYÉS										
The average number of persons daily employed is as follows :—										
	DE BEERS.		KIMBERLEY.		PREMIER.		WORKSHOPS.		ON THE ESTATES AND ELSEWHERE.	
	Whites.	Blacks.	Whites.	Blacks.	Whites.	Blacks.	Whites.	Blacks.	Whites.	Blacks.
Above ground	477	1851	187	925	46	423	388	211	28	118
Underground	212	2001	183	1322	105	489	—	—	—	—
TOTAL.										
										Whites. Blacks.
Above ground										1126 3528
Underground										500 3812
Grand total										1626 7340

The average number of white men employed has increased to over 2000 and the number of natives to over 11,000.

Figure 1.3

Average number of persons daily employed, yearly, above and below ground in De Beers Consolidated Mines Limited, 30 June 1897. Source: G. F. Williams, *The Diamond Mines of South Africa* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, [1902] 2011), p. 341.

a racial hierarchy where white bodies are rendered visible (above) and Black bodies invisible (below). As a prerequisite of racial capital, the racial dynamic of above *and* below determines who is forced to do the dangerous and dirty work – labouring at the face of the mine, carrying buckets, breathing dust, sorting the rubble, breaking their backs – and who oversees and inspects this work and ultimately derives the surplus value from that labour. According to Gardner Williams, an American mining engineer who became manager of De Beers in Kimberley in May 1887, ‘Only about a sixth of the workers in the mines are white,’ and he goes on to suggest that ‘the larger part of these are employed above ground on floors, in the workshops and in the offices of the mining companies.’ By suggesting that the largest proportion of white workers at the mine were employed above ground, and thus the majority of Black workers below, Gardner names the hierarchy of stratal relations that bind bodies in a racialised hierarchy of earth. In the same breath he characterises diamonds as ‘an uplifting power’ (1902: 560), but clearly only for some.

White miners’ need to survey Black bodies to secure the value of diamonds relied on the ability to maintain a racial hierarchy both below and above ground. Too many Black persons below would pose a threat of insurrection to reclaim the rewards of labour. Marxist materialism can make a map of these relations only insofar as it can account for the control of surplus value. A Black Marxist approach can stretch the relation further to see the raciality of governance and its excesses, but the geography lacks dimensionality and an account of the on-going psychosis of imaginaries that police those forces of coercion into the future. The propulsion of anti-Blackness can be understood as an environmental condition that the mine, as racialised portal, maintains.

The mine lies below. A place of displacement from the colonial surface and from the imperial geographies of land and fiscal destitution. However, below is not just spatial, nor simply networked into political-economic geographies. It is a spatiality of *converging forces*: in the mine, the elemental forces of heat, darkness, atmospheric pressure and the intensity of confinement coalesce with the historical forces of colonial control over bodies and the networked power geometries that connect to world-cities such as London as seats of political and corporate elites. In the mine, political forces such as the weaponisation of racial identity meld with the economic forces that devalue Black labour and life. In the mine, social forces that displace populations, render communities landless and enforce segregation intersect with the environmental forces that through

extraction have polluted and contaminated lands and water reserves. In the mine, linguistic forces that determine the right of languages to structure knowledge outside of colonial descent blend with the epistemic forces that through scientific classification, mapping and taxonomy delimit what is known and how. Together, these forces produce the *vortex of racial experience* that continues to puncture the possibilities of time to be outside the colonial portal of extraction.

In this chapter, we consider the mine as a portal, which is to think beyond the spatio-temporal located-ness of the mine and towards the geographies that animate and devastate that site (as a lived social materiality and as a durational environmental entity). The mine is, of course, a subterranean spatiality – an underground, volumetric or depth geography – and thus it is a three-dimensional excavation of spatial relations. Yet, the mine is also a *terminus* of the wider temporalities and geographical tentacles that move into the mine to make spatial relations elsewhere. The mine is its own place-based relation, but it is also mobile; it travels in the bodies of its workers, and in the extraction of value and how this account of value sediments racial-social forms of life. The mine moves the coordinates of place beyond its location, leaving embodied and durational social marks across southern Africa that remain active today.³ When conceived of as a portal, the mine not only becomes a space of brutalised and brutalising historical circumstances but also a centripetal force that through its extractive drive *sucks* life and land into its midst, devouring it in order for value to surface. In this geophysical suck, the mine is a necropolitical vortex of life *for* value.

In the colonial mine, value rises not through gravity but through the configuration of race and geology, specifically holding constant the ‘weight’

³ The legacy of these bodily and environmental transformations can be traced in the South African economy’s heavy dependency on the mining industry today. For example, the mining industry relies on the use of people – specifically what is described as ‘cheap’ Black labour – to do deep gold mining and, in the context of diamond deposits, where miners are exposed to asbestos that is found in deposits in proximity to kimberlite. The continuation of these violences of proximity to harm and the degradation of Black life can be witnessed through the catalogue of mining ‘disasters’, for example, the Rovic Diamond mine disaster in 1996, the *Marikana* massacre in 2012 or the state-sponsored murder of miners in Stilfontein in 2024–25.

of racialised persons as bodies that can be submerged without value attached and surface again before being stripped of that value to render them valueless, ready for resubmergence, against diamonds or the weight of gold. Thus, race is the geophysical mechanism that conditions the material consolidation of diamond value, not labour value alone. The will to know where bodies are located geologically in the mine – above *or* below – defines the activation of making value, while the dispersal of miners back into villages and into other spatial relations is only important as far as they can be drawn back into that relation with the necropolitical ecology of the mine. In Figure 1.4, children sort diamonds on the surface of the mine, awaiting their future below.

Conceiving of the mine as a portal not only draws attention to its base and surface but to the dimensionality of the traumatic fractures of land as an inverted relation in South Africa; in the internment of subjects in both forms of unfree labour and in the architecture of closed compounds, as well as in the amalgamations of negative spatial forms that attacked autonomy and

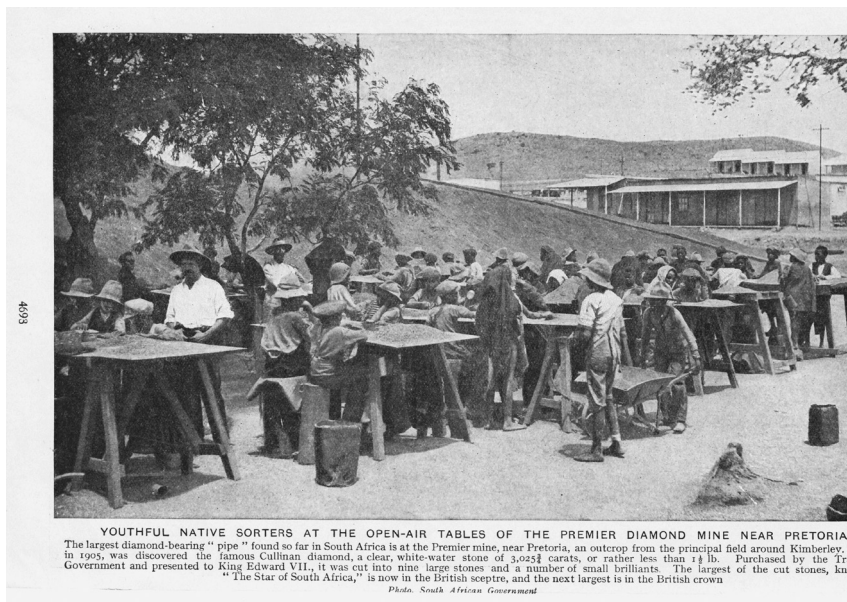


Figure 1.4

'Youthful native sorters at the open-air tables at the Premier diamond mine near Pretoria.' Source: J. Bucknall Smith, 'Diamond Mining in South Africa,' *The Strand Magazine*, 1896, p. 4697.

subjectivity, as they are constituted through and with land (see Figure 1.5).⁴ In the context of white farms and Black dispossession of land, uMbuso weNkosi argues that 'Black people can be wounded without accountability because this wound is not a wound to society – a Black society does not exist – but a wound to an unidentified being' (2023: 100).

The counting of above *and* below in Figure 1.3 allows an ordering to take place and a replication of 'ideal' ratios to occur: the bureaucratic 'accounting' stabilised the negative (below) and positive (above) value dialectics so that value can rise, unimpeded, from below. The bureaucracy of Apartheid's

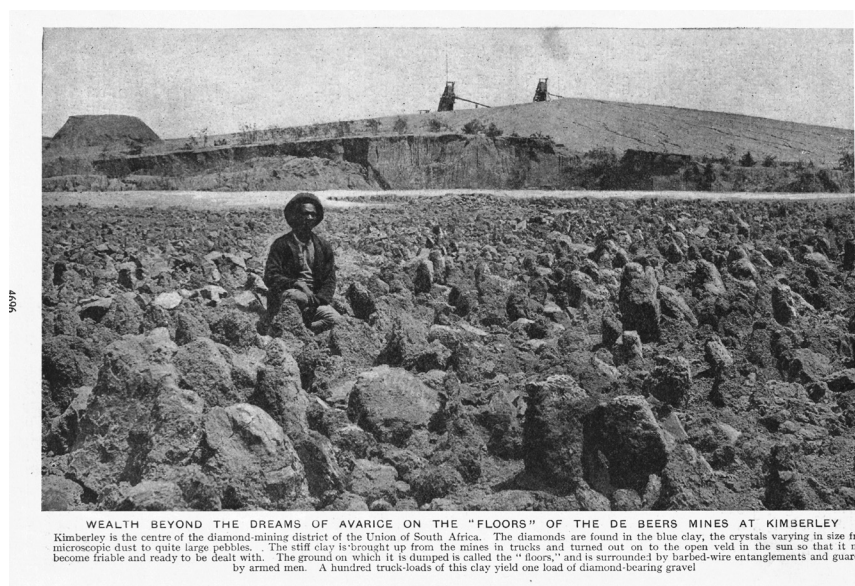


Figure 1.5

'Wealth beyond the dreams of avarice on the "floors" of the De Beers Mines at Kimberley.' Source: J. Bucknall Smith, 'Diamond Mining in South Africa,' *The Strand Magazine*, 1896, p. 4696.

⁴ The 'making landless' of Black communities aimed to create conditions of being nowhere (rather than somewhere in place-based possession) and in the possession of nothing, which subsequently used geographical displacement as a prerequisite for relocation and harm. The prerequisite of being a subject of 'nowhere' conditions entrance into the mine, transforming geographical conditions into a necropolitical form of subjectivity.

blueprint is sequestered in the dynamics of the diamond mine; the table carries value in its numbers by racialising the volume of the mine and demonstrating how value is transferred and accumulated through the colour line of above and below.

Racial capital emerges as an accumulative mode in the exchange between racial and labour value: racial value is *sucked* through geographical containment, subjective capture, and making people landless. Black subjects were placed in a spatial hierarchy in relation to the ground to generate diamonds as value. As the ledger determines the geostratal conditions of visibility (above *or* below), Black subjects become visible only once they threaten to break the stratal value-hierarchy (by rising from the mine with value and keeping hold of it rather than relinquishing it to the stratifying institutions of whiteness, or by being 'scarce' as a labour supply, or by organising to challenge the forms of devaluation that are accorded). From rendering Black subjects valueless to stripping them of value (through the reclamation of perceived 'stolen' value), value is only ever maintained through the fetishisation of violence and the ability to create concrete conditions of dehumanising geophysical force. In the following section, we consider how the spatial formalisation of this violence occurs first through the imagination and technics of consolidation and then through the spatial resolution of containment at the mines in the form of the labour compound, replicating the prison complex mine (Yusoff 2024: 343). Once the mine and the prison become indistinguishable, above ground also performs as a negative psychic architecture of below.

Consolidation and Containment

Colonialism, then, was a set of arrangements designed and perceived to give pleasure. An aesthetic. A dream. A desire. And one no sooner dreamt than realised. (Brand 2024: 112)

The *Plan of Ownership in Kimberley Mine* (see Figure 1.6), a cartographic-cartoonish map drawn by Mr K. Tucker (1882), shows the property claims laid over what became the mine of all mines: Kimberley mine. Initially, the map shows the topography of this great round-shaped hole, which is flattened by a grid of quadrants plotted as eastlings and northlings, harnessing the geography of the hole. Each parcel carries the name of the given mine-owner, marking the displaced landscape as their property (Vulcan, Robinson, Cape, Octahedron dia. Mining, Standard, Barnato etc.) in the creation of what was known as a 'claim'. Rendered autonomous from the land and its relational

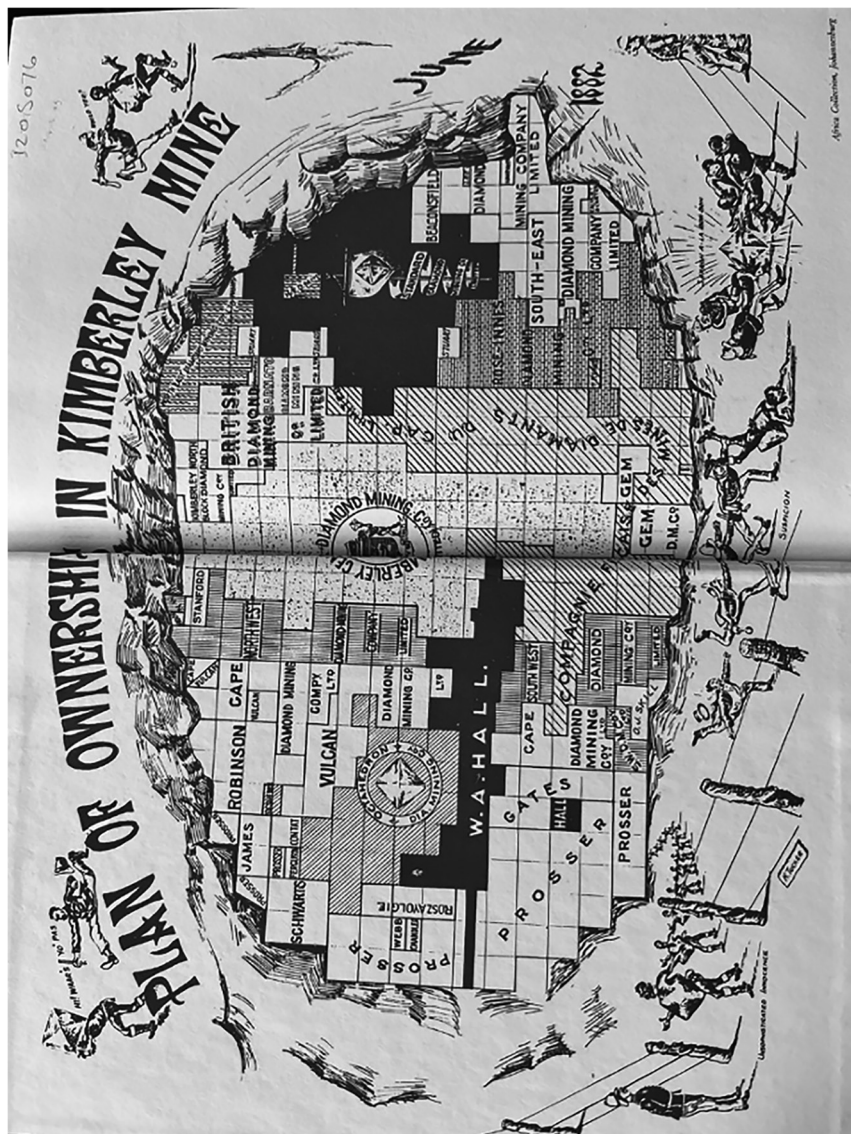


Figure 1.6

Plan of Ownership in Kimberley Mine, 1882. Source: S. Kanfer, *The Last Empire: De Beers, Diamonds, and the World* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1993), frontispiece.

forms of making life and meaning, the map of claims provided a graphical unit for speculative capital. For a while, Kimberley was lauded as the biggest hole on earth, a hole without equal (until another big hole of its namesake in Kimberley, Australia, opened in 1985). The hole repeats as a colonial motif, a spatial modality of portalling into the earth's deep-time holdings and displacing people through land theft in the service of extractions for the geographical expansion of white supremacy.

The negative space of the hole performs a 'shadow geology' (Yusoff 2024), the shadow space depicted in Figures 0.3 and 0.4 which distils material value in the production of the diamond. The forceful *suck* of the mine creates a material and spatial compression of bodies and earths that is necessary for value to surface from the depths of the hole. The 'shadow' space of the diamond mine (mirrored in Figures 0.3 and 0.4), floats on a configuration of race that determines *how* value surfaces and circulates, and *who* benefits from its circulation. A map of Kimberley mine was produced annually throughout the 1880s that depicts the transition to concentrated ownership. A world of propertied division and containment emerges that provides a key to navigating claims while asserting a geographical imagination of a most violent policing of bodies and earths. As described above, consolidation of the claims sought to monopolise production, engineer scarcity and stabilise the fluctuation of value – renaming each of the quadrants on the claims map (Figure 1.6) after De Beers, that is, Rhodes.

If we turn our attention away from the history of proprietorship depicted in the map in Figure 1.6 to instead consider the cartoon depictions drawn at the edges of the plan, we notice the salacious representations of racial 'interactions' between white mine bosses and Black subjects who are signed as 'labor' and 'native', often with the appendage of 'raw'. Following colonial cartographic traditions of grounding property claims in hierarchical racial propositions, the dynamics of territory in South Africa emerges through the imaginative framework that surrounds the map to consolidate the centre: the racial regime of property. The 'disputes' between Black and white subjects occur in the space normally occupied by mythological creatures in cartographic traditions, signalling the liminal exchange between the 'known' and 'unknown' and the symbolic formations that manifest that non-knowledge. The economy of representation was as important to the consolidation of diamond power as the cartographic manifestation of its claims.

The aesthetics of these cartoons conjures the domestic violence and infanticide of British *Punch and Judy* shows and the caricatured figures in the shadow geographies of Kara Walker, which explore the psychological injury

of racial stereotypes (see Kara Walker, *A Shadow Drama in Five Acts*, 1995 and *Freedom: A Fable*, 1997, for example). The joint theft of land and personhood and the colonial project of managing this contradiction required colonisers to reimagine the Black body as a site through which to project and invert the claim and boundaries of 'rightful' ownership. Caricaturist Victorian policemen appeal to a moral economy of the colonial project as corrective and just, serving as a reminder that administrating and licensing Kimberley mine fell under the British jurisdiction of the Cape Colony. Policing the boundaries of theft thus reins in, as an imaginative resolve, the explosion of the abject that is instigated by colonial subjects in their dehumanisation of Black life. The scalar effects of the solid architecture of above and below have a psychic doubling in the imaginative geography of the carceral mine/mind.

Colonialism is world-making predicated on stealing. The racist depictions of Black subjects in the cartoons in Figure 1.6 stage disputes with white people over diamonds. The implications are clear in each of these cartoons: the Black characters are trying to steal diamonds; the white ones retrieve what is imagined to be rightfully theirs. If every accusation is also a confession, this map discloses how value is made, whereby the ideas of theft that protect and threaten whiteness are inverted through the land and projected into the corporeal space of Blackness. The Black body is made into the container and receptacle for all the excessive passions – sexual, violence, imaginary, wildness – while also standing in for the mine: the site of endless extraction. In these cartoons, whiteness attempts to travel through the Black body, destroying any resistance or friction caused by its brutal passage.

The imaginative claims on the map and its preceding act of making people landless reverses the colonial act of stealing land and subjects as environmentally and historically co-constituted beings, narrating it instead as a morality claim on the *right* of colonial property. Colonial property-making established a narrative foundation of the production of racial subjects (Bhandar 2018). Making landless meets in the cross-hairs of the psychosis of those who cannot think of the earth as home and can only see the earth as property. In considering the role of geology and geological matter in the mechanics of stealing resources, making people landless and unmaking sovereignty, we can see the mine as a possessive act of whiteness that is secured through the medium of geological matter and narrated as race. Alongside, and attentive to socialities with the earth, forms of meaning-making that resist theft as the basis of life refuse this enclosure and flattening. Despite the claims of the imaginative cartography of the Plan of Ownership, the portal is not a totalising architecture. It is a leaky passage.

Mine, as in the possessive pronoun, a place, and a form of destitution inflicted upon persons and land for the consolidation of dreams of white supremacy, is a portal of extraction that is operative in imaginative, geographical and material registers. The plan and its figurations lay bare how the act of consolidation and surfacing of value through the change of state of geological matter relies on the brutalisation of racial dynamics. As in the branding of the Royal African Company of England, race denoted both a categorisation of value and an active corporeal property claim over personhood, branded in flesh.

Through the cartography of struggle over wealth – which turns a landscape into a mine, an earth into a diamond, a ground into a hole and a gendered policing of the Black body into the realisation of white heteronormative dreams – an imagination of the totality of value is realised in the diamond. The diamond becomes a material unit that enacts the spatiality of a portal, as it reformulates the racial power as a vertiginous event or geophysical restructuring. The plan gives us the four stages of *diamond power* through consolidation: (1) the diamond thief as an embodied and embodying subject of stolen value that requires (and thus justifies) the policing of the Black body for the accumulation of value for whiteness; (2) the doubling of extraction as realised through the racialisation of bodies (as Black and white) and earths; (3) the body as scripted through an assimilatory narration of earth and people as simultaneously bound to and fractured by the violence of incorporation in coloniality (made landless and displaced in the redescription of the new earth-based assimilations of extraction); (4) the necessity of a new environmental contract of reimagining and re-enacting relations that reunite the subject with the earth, in a relation that refuses the aforementioned cartographies of capture and modes of extraction in the totality of the consolidation of value; epistemically and empirically.

The popularly reproduced map of Kimberley expands upon the role of geographical imaginations in materialising the world and the (dis)figuration of the male Black body as an enduring target within a politics of reconfiguration of the conversion of land into resource. In the racist caricature in the left-hand corner, diamonds are seen protruding out of the subjects' chests and stomachs as they cross the barbed-wire fence, which delimits the containment of the diamond compound. The exchangeability of Black life and its infinite renewal are indicated by the never-ending line of bodies to the horizon point, which come from the mine in a socially reproductive form of life, called native and 'raw' labour, as a resource without end in the colonial imagination ('resources' that continue to find its forms of occupation in

the landless racialised poor, predominantly in the Global South). As Achille Mbembe instructs, 'Native life, in turn, was both indispensable and expendable. Because native life was seen as excessive and naturally doomed to self-destruction, it constituted a wealth that could be lavishly spent' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008: 43). Uniform, replaceable and unlimited, native life augmented the psychosis of compression and containment that conditioned the imagination and materiality of excess, with the consolidation of a lavish libidinal intent to imagine white supremacy at large, at the scale of continents. The spatial psychosis of white supremacy's dream of the last empire paralleled the material psychosis that compressed a big hole into a tiny diamond and created a portal that sucked value through the devaluation of all other forms of valuation of life and geographical possibility. Material psychosis can be understood as a form of derangement induced by a change in the material state of the physical environment or a disassociation in relation to geophysical characteristics of relation (i.e. whiteness as the narration and practice of the earth as an externality).

The utilisation of the 'excess' of Black labour also becomes a haunting in the very same fear of the boundless fungibility of Blackness. The weaponisation of the boundlessness of Blackness has also been reimaged and theorised as a superfluousness that can be thought as a counterforce of resistance and as a means to travel across the cartographic grids of containment in binaries, such as life/death (see Canham 2023; King 2016; Yusoff 2024). By expanding the space of whiteness, the portal enacted a diminishing of Indigenous life, rescripting temporal narratives of the sites and origins of value away from the land as a living entity and participant in lifeforms and into economies of capture as 'dead matter.' This doubling of the spatial contraction of value and containment of Blackness orchestrated the continuum of extraction in body and earth via the diamond pyramid scheme. Here, the processes of racialisation and the imagination of a specific material psychosis of detachment enact a contraction and transference that create a portal to contract life and severe attachments, performing geographical compressions and the intensification of racial value, where every mine is a portal and every portal a mine. The process of doubling the geography of extraction – as mine and as Blackness – is how mining becomes inseparable from the history (and future) of race in South Africa (and elsewhere, in the case of global Blackness). The portal pivot in Figures 0.3 and 0.4 replicates spatial relations in both the governance of the mine and the governance of Black personhood. The distillation, checks, margins of 'waste,' processes of subjecting to pressure, reducing and containing the Black body are all also processes by which diamonds are rendered out of the kimberlite rock.

Violence maintains a relation to the possibilities of living and emits frequencies that condition how containment is negotiated. 'Unsophisticated Innocence' is the tagline of the cartoon in Figure 1.6, where the diamond thief is an embodied and embodying racialised subject caught in duality of the caught thief/recovered diamond, thereby denoting whiteness as the police that adjudicate value and its destination. The implication is that it is natural to steal, as the narrative arc of colonialism asserts in the idea of empire, because the theft is framed as the naturalisation of white supremacy (and the material progression needed to sustain it); however, the manner of 'native' hiding is deemed neither competent nor clever and thus must be policed by the intelligence of whiteness, which in turn makes broader claims to the paternalism of colonial powers and its rights to dominate. Both the label of unsophistication and innocence hint at the eugenic narratives of 'white man's burden' that underpin the reading of the portal Ponzi scheme: a form of racial politics where one does not get out what they materially put in, so to speak.

In 1872, 'native claims' to ownership of mines were prohibited and Indigenous Africans were barred from owning or trading in diamonds (thus prohibiting ownership of geological materials). The geological exclusion zone around the possession of diamonds was articulated as a form of geological and racial property that only whiteness could hold (i.e. the material origins of the universe). On the diamond sorting floors, white employers received 1s 6d. per carat and 'natives' 3d. per carat, rewarding white employees six times more than Black employees. The subtext to the cartoon is that what is stolen is not just a material object but the white right to supremacy and the origins of the earth. The right to steal is the basis of whiteness and secures the materialisation of its sovereignty and supremacy. Whiteness and diamonds are narrated as imaginative allotropes placed at the pinnacle of the pyramid in Figures 0.3 and 0.4.

In another cartoon in Figure 1.6, four white characters set upon a figure with a large diamond strapped to his front. They have caught his leg, and the tagline is 'suspicion'. In another, a Black body is pulled apart by two groups of white men with a diamond haemorrhaging out of the centre of his torso, under which is the script 'Search a la Bon Bon'. The body is rendered as a container of value, brutally cracked open; the subtitle infers stolen sweets. A colonial officer looks on, leaning casually against a post of the fence that encloses the mine, scrutinising and securitising. On the one hand, this cartography clearly delineates the imagination and exercising of mutilation as a key tenant of diamond power, on the other, it names a deeper fear of the ones that can birth a diamond, who can hold the origins of the universes in their flesh and travel

across borders with those origin rocks and their elemental power. The dissociation of colonialism with the earth, the separability of whiteness from land and the inability to recognise reciprocal ties with the earth create a condition of *dissociative earth*. This engineered fracture from relation that colonialism exercised all over the earth and in its epistemic orders and philosophical treaties is also its blindspot, as the errantscapes of fungibility with land and earth live a different erotics and experience of the ground (see Canham 2023: 124–125). In the space of white supremacies cut from the earth, a whole ‘psychic riot’ (Canham 2023: 125) of experimental earths lives.

In the top right-hand corner of Figure 1.6, another man is apprehended by an officer with a club. A further figure populates the imaginative anxiety of theft with a large diamond on his back, chased by a colonial officer shouting ‘waar’s yo’pas’? denoting the pass system as the enclosure that curtailed wider geographies and arrested movement across southern Africa, funnelling labour into the mine. After the outlawing of Black or indigenous claims to mines and the introduction of pass logs, which became compulsory to carry, these identity documents detailing the terms of contracts had to be procured by white owners as an extension of their ownership of labour. In effect, the pass was a form of indentured labour, a mechanism to deny control over the fruits of one’s labour, in which the threat of convict-lease labour was to further push racialised subjects into becoming the contractual property of the state to be sold to mines. While the map of the ‘Big Hole’ makes clear that the ‘natives’ are trying to pull a fast one and steal diamonds, the ‘waar’s yo’pas’ refers to the outer rim of the portal that organised the cartography of racial geographies that meant racialised subjects were dragged towards its centripetal force. Such a concentrated focus on stealing might provoke some reflection, perhaps? What and who is being stolen by the mine? What kind of a portal is it into racialised time and its architectures of affect, secured through the stolen autonomy of Black miners? What imaginary of the male mining body secures the geology of possession and continues to secure discourses of extraction?

The figures of contestation that adorn the subjectivity of each of the four corners of the map represent the liminal space of the cartographic and the lithic arrangements of extraction. Tiffany Lethatho King argues that the Black body’s geographical relationship to New World expansion under relations of, but not solely defined by, conquest of settler spatial orders is raised in the cross-hairs of fungibility: ‘Black bodies represent elaborate processes of chemical breakdown, re-assemblage and states of transition on the colonial landscape’ (King 2016: 1208). These figures on the edges of ownership claims are an inventory, rendered in plain view, of the geographical practice

of reading what threatens white geopolitics and its claims to property through the figurative. They configure the white settler in relation to land and those that inhabit that land as a bodily and cartographic challenge of specific formulations of the interpenetration of bodies and land (as an expanding portal of extraction).

More than anything, land became a place in which racial forms of sovereignty were articulated and enforced through the repeated acts and tactics of making people landless. Land was a calculus of political economy by which labour was released for circulation and a contingent point of remaking of environments for the accumulation of white value. In the simplest sense, a version of land as resource shaped the dimensions of the conceptualisation of labour, as well as forcing its mobility. The conversion of value to surplus is not labour per se but the withdrawal of sovereignty, whereby the withdrawal of a place-based environmental condition of attachment is severed, making landlessness the converter or precondition of value. The co-joined site for the inscription of this white geopolitics (see Yusoff 2024: 33–34, 257–261) was the Black body as land or geology. Mbembe argues, with reference to the Black miner's body:

It could be searched every day at the end of the shift in the mines. It could be stripped naked, required to jump over bars. Hair, nose, mouth, ears, or rectum could be scrutinised with meticulous care. Floggings with sjambok (leather whip) or tent rope, or striking with fists, were the rule ... In order to memorialise themselves, public and private powers traced their signs on naked flesh of the black body. They belabored it and laid it bare through various techniques: tattooing, excising, incising, carving, scarifying, mutilating, or encircling. (Mbembe and Nutall 2008: 51)

Being bound in the category of the 'native' was an unbinding from a relation to the earth, and the erasing of interiority and poise of privacy was an extension of that relation.

Mine–Compound–Prison Complex

The racialised apartheid of above and below is mirrored in the carceral system of removing subjects from the right to geographical freedom and ties to land, and confining them to the prison complex, as if submerged within an inverse time-space to the coloniser. The mine–compound–prison complex was the architectural realisation of how to further contract value for the expansion of whiteness, as settler force and imperial extractor. As the mines grew, so too

did the forms of administration that enlarged the reach of diamond power. After 1850 convict-lease labour was viewed as a 'supplement' to the fraught labour supply and a way to 'backfill' the deficit of labour for settler works in the rest of the Cape that was created by the suck of Kimberley diamond mines. De Beers first started 'using' incarcerated labour (300 incarcerated persons) through the convict lease in an attempt to cut labour costs. During the amalgamation of mines in Kimberley, De Beers set up close compounds to 'settle' the consolidation with a contained labour supply (see Figure 1.7). In 1888, De Beers reached a further agreement with the Cape authorities and established a station for the incarcerated adjacent to the mine (700 incarcerated persons). While the majority of those that were incarcerated were African (incarcerated under infractions that the pass scheme made possible), the minority of white prisoners overwhelmingly came from Kimberley mines and were convicted for stealing rough diamonds. As with the mines and compounds, from the late 1880s, incarceration was segregated. In the spatial mirroring of the hole, the compound (for 'free' and incarcerated) was a prison in all but name for housing racial value and devaluation (for more on compounds, see Mabin 1986: 13; Worger 2004). And so, it became an ideal colonial model compound for the racial regulation of value. One correspondent for the *London Times* named De Beers compound as a 'Monastery of Labour' (Williams 1905: 88).



Figure 1.7

'Compound enclosed by wire netting, De Beers mine, Kimberley'. Source: photographer and date unknown.

In the James Bond film *Diamonds Are Forever* (1971), one of the opening scenes shows a body search being carried out by a white doctor in the De Beers mine compound. After the search it is revealed that the doctor and miner are in cahoots, stealing diamonds out of the mine; 007 is seconded to investigate. Given the attention to geopolitics in the narrative of Bond films, it might at first seem surprising that Her Majesty's Government had been drafted in to investigate thefts in the private diamond mines of De Beers. Notwithstanding the naked silhouettes of Black women with cats wearing diamond chokers between their legs and Shirley Bassey singing one of the greatest put-downs of patriarchy – 'Men are mere mortals who are not worth going to your grave for ... Diamonds never lie to me / For when love's gone, they'll lustre on...' – the film doesn't have a lot to say about diamond mining apart from that it's a dirty business filled with murderous intent and with a complicated narrative of sexuality – that the film, in turn, does nothing to resolve. The emergence of the diamond in the narrative of heterosexual coupling, as well as its consecration as a defining stage in the trajectory towards marriage, is well accounted for, as discussed in the upcoming Chapter 2, 'Mimesis and Madness.' What remains underneath this patriarchal coupling, in which the diamond is the glue of value that cements the transaction of heteronormativity, is the sexualised economy of gendered and sexualised apartheid that materially transmutes its emergence.

Among the private photographs in the De Beers archive is a visual series of intimate cavity searches that speak to the sexualised violations that upheld and contributed to the generation of value in the diamond (see Pointon 2018). The photographs were presumably used as a guide for conduct on the forms of sexual violence that accompanied moving in and out of the mining compound to combat the 'illicit' diamond trade. In the continuance of violent colonial intimacies and inhuman bodily violations the technology of X-rays was enthusiastically taken up by mines (the first at Jagersfontein diamond mine in Johannesburg in 1898) and used without any regard to exposure durations or frequencies (see Rentetzi 2024).

The diamond in the colonial paradigm performs as a temporal sparkle of deep time but relates as spatial structure to the dehumanising matter(s) of its base. Diamonds were created with the big bang, possibly as dust particles, so the co-natal moment of the creation of the universe is narrated as an elementary story of deep-time possession or eternity: its origins can be understood as located in the psychosis and physics of the mine/hole. A psychic relation is established between the Black body and its eruption with diamonds, one that threatens the coloniser's account of value and possession. The severity of the forms of spatial enclosure and surveillance, the levels of bodily invasion

and control that are practised in the Kimberley compound, suggests an over-compensation in the psychic terror of policing the collapse of borders of value. The violence of the mines' incarceration of Black subjects, subjected to constant intimate body searches, imprisonment and hard labour, as well as gender and sexual segregation, was not hidden but rather the very point of how the Ponzi scheme functioned as vertigo. Xuma, the protagonist of Peter Abrahams's novel *Mine Boy*, reflects on the ambiguity of this capture into the mines in the stark terms of existence as a memetic 'thing' for whiteness: 'He was a mine boy, a black man, and he was nothing. He was a worker, a laborer, a machine to dig gold for white men.' And yet, the 'only place where he was completely free was underground in the mines ... There he did not even fear his white man, for his white man depended on him. He was the boss boy ... And underground his white man respected him and asked him for his opinion before they did anything. It was so and he was at home and at ease in the underground' (Abrahams 1985: 63). As Mbembe comments, the diffraction of the divisions of race had to be constantly animated: 'For racism to acquire such power, profit and delirium had to be so closely connected as to constantly trigger the vertiginous capacity of the native to be both a thing and a metonym of something else' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008: 44), in which 'delirium was expressed in the form of a primal repression at once political and psychic' (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008: 45). If repression was a temporal act then its reprisal is the retrieval of the spatial manifestation that consolidated the repressive drive. The mine literally stands in for the return of the repressed as a material act that consolidates the coordinates of value.

That something so shiny could come from such devastating racial violence and horror seemed to be the point, or at the very least how the geo-logics of the diamond pinnacle of value functioned (and later, how the aesthetic discourse of modernity and sheen would become prominent). As Rosa Lyster (2022) suggests, 'People obsess over diamonds precisely because of the human cost involved. We love a diamond story that emphasises the contrast between the starry white at the top of the queen's sceptre and the pitch-black hell from which it was pulled' (n.p). Notwithstanding who the 'we' is, purity was always about supremacy; danger was a byproduct of that tense engagement that enlivened its achievement. The 'rough' in which the diamond is located as an idiom [noting the paternal etymology, 'something that is in poor condition but that is likely to become valuable with appropriate care or attention' was a condensed set of racialised subjections across multiple fields. 'Diamond in the rough' (Britannica Dictionary, n.d.) actually relates to the fact that diamonds almost always occur in more or less well-formed crystals that are embedded,

never raised in their entirety. Thus, locating the mine in relation to the racial economy of bodily and sexual ordering provides a spatial mirroring to the diamond's own environmental economy in relation to the land itself as *embedded*.

A parallel popular photographic genre to the 'theft of diamonds' narrative was the 'diamond stealer with his booty', which depicted a diptych of the 'guilty' man alongside another photograph of the 'retrieved' diamonds, polished and laid out on crushed black velvet (for 'diamond thief' portraits, which include pictures of children; Williams [1902] 2011: 446–468; Williams 1905: 86–87). The deep investment in this photographic genre (as it has no real utility beyond the classificatory imagination of a Black 'guilty' subject designated 'Diamond Thief') is to make the viewer think about where the diamonds have been, where they have travelled, before they radiate their value on crushed velvet (see Figure 1.8). It is not simply that value must use up and discard the body of Blackness but that value must violently pass through that body so that it can function as racialised value in capitalist economies. Once the diamonds emerge through the violent devouring of the Black body, the plush velvet psychically doubles as the neutralised Black body, the dark canvas on which white power can inscribe itself. Similar to the cracker image, the ruptured body is not perceived as a body of feeling in the dynamics of white society; the imaginary robs the body of its perceived capacity to feel and turns a material interest (value) into a naturalised state of existence (violent psychosis). By conceiving of the mine as a planetary portal, the process of generating value from the mining of diamonds can be described as a materially violent process with reference to Equation 1: the corporeal assimilation and fungibility of Black bodies in the material transformation of environments (m_c) which produces a negative space in which local populations and land are transformed into resource (N_{rv}).

The brutalisation of sexuality as a form of labour coercion made it a currency in the continuum of how to exercise power. Men due for discharge from their contracts were separated into a wire cage with up to a hundred other men for five to seven days, where they were stripped naked and their hands bound by large leather mittens that were padlocked, and they were given laxatives to move through any 'stolen' rocks. They were made to eat on all fours. Before discharge, all orifices, cuts and cavities were checked. And their boots and shoes were taken in case diamonds had been secreted within them. As Lindsay Weiss argues: 'This somatic process was enacted on every single one of the tens of thousands of workers who left the compounds and marked a foundational set of biopolitical impositions that primed the labour system for the 20th century apartheid project.' (Weiss 2011a: 29).



DIAMONDS SWALLOWED BY A NATIVE AT ONE TIME, AND ALL RECOVERED AFTER FOUR DAYS. TOTAL WEIGHT, 348 CARATS ; VALUE, £1067 : 4 : 6.

Figure 1.8

'Diamonds swallowed by a native at one time, and all recovered after four days. Total weight, 348 carat; value, £1067 : 4 : 6.' Source: G. F. Williams, *The Diamond Mines of South Africa Vol. II* (New York: B. F. Buck & Company, 1905), p. 85.

Contemporaneous newspaper articles marvelled at the retrieval of stolen diamonds. *The Strand Magazine* pictures 'a recovered stolen diamond, weighing 428 carats-actual size', remarking on how it was 'stolen by a native, but recovered by a detective three hours afterwards. This flawless diamond measured 1 7-8 in. [inches] across the major axis, and weighed over three ounces' (Smith 1896: 354). In another photographic portrait, the author recommends:

Just look at the culprit overleaf. The ten gems seen in his hand weigh carats, and were swallowed by the man, but ultimately recovered. It will be seen that the leather mittens are chained to his hands to prevent his further manipulation or secretion of the stones. The expression of his face clearly indicates the troubles that are in store for him, as punishment for his crime. (Smith 1896: 354)

The psychic corollary of the diamond is clear; it tramples through the personhood as a 'recovery' of value. In the anxiety of stealing and its policing, the prison complex-compound emerged as a spatial model of the management and control of Black geographies in pursuit of capital.

A Model Compound

Every conceivable means of protecting the blue clay district is used by the great company. The employees are practically slaves and no man of the district may sell a diamond without a license; but, nethertheless, officials estimate the annual 'leakage' to be somewhere between one and a quarter and three million dollars, which is a large percentage of the twenty-seven-million-dollar production which forms a year's output for these greatest of diamond mines. (Advertisement, Protecting Kimberley's Diamonds, by Edward Irving)

Public reporting of the architecture of the Kimberley compound marvels at the enclosure surrounded by netting over the sky and barbed wire on top of high fences. Mirroring the cobweb-like appearance of the pit in the 1870s, quoted at the start of the chapter, the compound surrounding the mine was a cage with wire on all sides, and a fence framed the sky: the compound was a sealed container that replicated the racial architectures of the underground, overground. The dual act of enclosure and consolidation is applied to both earth and those that work it to make escape 'possible only to a pole vaulter (see Figure 1.7). The science of barbed-wire entanglements protecting the mines has been reduced to certainty in the scores of miles of fence'

(Advertisement, Protecting Kimberley's Diamonds, by Edward Irving). The mines were lit all night with electric arc lamps and guarded by a system of trip alarm bells that circled the barbed-wire fences of 20 square miles owned by De Beers (International News Service, n.d.: 636). The totality of containment is such that 'During their engagement with the company these natives are never allowed to mix with the outside world, but live in "compounds" or inclosures [sic] specially constructed for the accommodation with the precincts of the company's property' (Smith 1896: 352), wherein 'native' life is conceptualised as a spatial division of property:

These inclosures [sic] are fenced in with barbed wire – for all the world as though the men were cattle and had to be kept from straying into a neighbour's field. The boundaries are periodically patrolled by guard to prevent the escape of natives or their communication with scheming outsiders. (Smith 1896: 353)

In the imaginary of the ideal compound, the first question is to interrogate the ideation. The psychoanalytical satiation of diamond theft became the ideation that justified the unjustifiable stealing of land and personhood (such that capture in a compound enacted).

As Turrell (1984: 75) explains:

The compound system that was to become a striking feature of most mining enterprises in Southern and Central Africa was first introduced in the diamond mines at Kimberley. In the period of open mining (1871–1884), Africans lived in open compounds, which gave them the freedom to spend their leisure time where they pleased. In the period of underground mining (beginning in 1885), Africans were isolated from the surrounding town in closed compounds. The closed compounds of the De Beers Consolidated Company were soon regarded as models of social welfare and aspects of their system were copied at other mining centres in Africa.

While Turrell (1984: 66) shows that there were welfare improvements after 1903 (with a mortality rate of 684 deaths in 1901 or over 10 per cent of the total miners), the bar, like in the mines of southern states of America, was subterranean and almost non-existent, such that 'improvements' were largely around securing the conditions for increased labour productivity. The development of the diamond mines (Kimberley) and gold mines (Witwatersrand or the Rand) was directly connected to the process and scale of land dispossession and the undermining of autonomy that comes from place-based and largely self-sufficient agronomy, as discussed in Chapter 4, 'Red Lines, White Spots'. This is what Tshidiso Maloka calls the 'engendering of the system of labour

migracy during this phase of “primitive accumulation,” for the purpose of ensuring a reliable supply of cheap African labour for the mine’ (Maloka 1998: 17; see also Green 2020a and Figure 1.9). The Kimberley compound held around 3,000 men in an area of 25 acres, with accommodation areas in the outer perimeter of small rooms of wooden stacked bunks housing 25 workers of 25 by 30 ft. There were 17 compounds on the diamond fields, with De Beers owning 12 of these. Within the compound there were shops, butchers, food stalls, medical services, a hospital, a church and a much-lauded swimming pool (Williams 1905: 54–55), which was often mentioned in accounts of the ‘model compound’ – doubling as a figuration of civilisation and benefaction in a cultural landscape in which swimming was an archetypal space of racial segregation across the colonial world (as a geography of white-only pools and beaches that marked colonial space, see Figure 1.10). Photos from the time depict the ‘amusement’ of white visitors who threw coins in the swimming pool to be fetched (William 1905: 80). Miners were also supplied with Bibles printed in different tribal languages and instructed by missionaries on such topics of monogamy (Williams 1905: 72).



Figure 1.9

Inside the compound, wire netting above. Source: unknown.

As a seemingly benevolent offering to the 11,000 African mine workers below and above ground (Williams 1905: 52), a wider array of sports infrastructures and games facilities entered the mines alongside swimming pools – football pitches, dance arenas, cricket and boxing facilities – with the intent of giving the compound an appearance of normality despite its prison architecture (see Figure 1.10). Lit by huge arc lamps, miners went into the shaft – reached from an underground passage leading from the compound – in three shifts that ran across day and night. From there miners were taken up and down the shaft in cages. Impervious to embodied costs of mining, a contemporaneous historian comments: ‘Their sinewy frames and powers of endurance enable them to labor day in and out without any apparent injury to their health’ (Williams 1905: 62–63). The spaces of leisure were introduced to keep the working body fit and encourage ways to kill time during off-work hours but, as commentators argue, they were at the heart of the colonial complex, weaponising corporeal activity

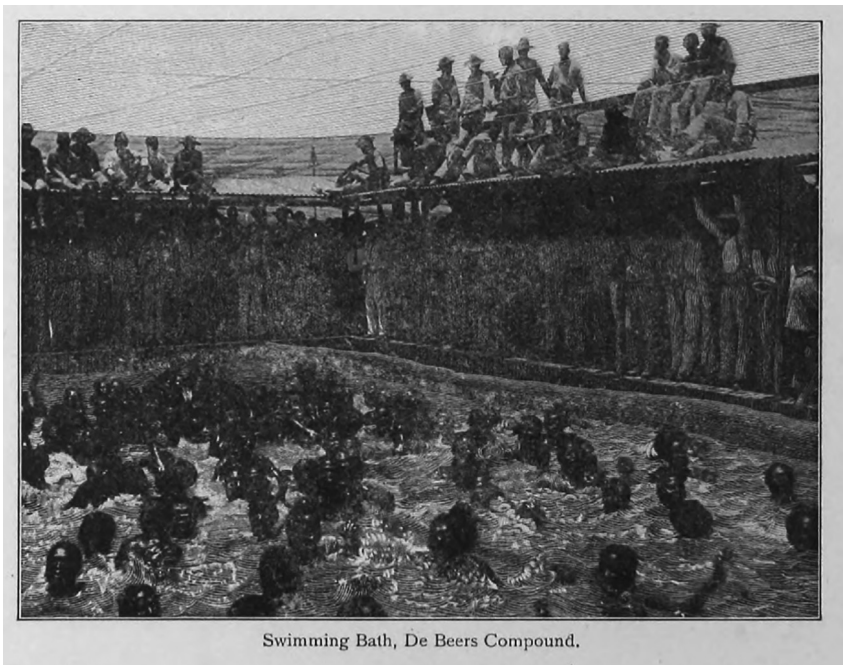


Figure 1.10

‘Swimming bath, De Beers Compound’. Source: G. F. Williams, *The Diamond Mines of South Africa Vol. II* (New York: B. F. Buck & Company, 1905), p. 80.

and bodily health in the service of colonial control (Dunbar Moodie 1992; Malunga 2000).

At Kimberley in 1878, Barney Barnato, the main claim holder at the time and co-founder of De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, established an amateur boxing club (Gems 2014), a sport he had nurtured in London where he boxed and fixed matches in the East End. Barnato's boxing club drew interest from mine workers who came to watch and fight in bare-knuckle fights, but reports suggest that mine workers did not take up the sport under European direction (Ranger 1987). Instead, *Musangwe*, the bare-knuckle sport practised by the Venda people in the north since the early 1800s, found its way into mining compounds – especially the gold and copper mines further to the north. Against public decrees, mine workers organised illegal fights to take place in open spaces and on disused sports facilities like football fields and arenas (Malunga 2000), and in that way physical exercise and expression through fighting became a space of refusal and reimagination. Informal arrangements between police and labourers permitted mine workers to cross the boundaries of what was considered 'acceptable' behaviour: illegal bare-knuckle fights became *the* recreational pastime activity that people engaged in as performers and spectators, placing bets and hedging their futures.

Mine labourers worked nine to ten hours a day Monday to Saturday. Six days a week, they were pushed underground into the compressed and claustrophobic spaces of the mine, rising above only to find themselves 'dining' in decrepit and crumbling food halls and sleeping in overcrowded shacks with little or no privacy on concrete slabs and in iron cages. The pressurised spaces of the mine compound functioned as a 'total institution,' an organisation of people on violent terms into a closed unit, cut off from the surrounding world (Bolt and Rajak 2016). Sunday was their day off, providing release from the pressurised everyday of the total institution, momentarily suspending mine workers from the hellish underworld that brought them into touching distance with death. If the mine operated as a portal through its forceful *suck*, Sundays became the time where centripetal forces turned centrifugal: a vent for all that compressed vitality that throughout the week had been pushed underground. Sundays were like isostatic rebound – the slow rising of land masses after large ice sheets melt and release their downward pressure – the slow rising of bodies after six days of being pushed into the ground.

Yet, the refusal to submit to the official rules imposed by Western boxing culture and instead engage in the bare-knuckle *Musangwe* battles (Ranger 1987) suggests that Sundays were about more than just killing time; they were about refusing a form of imposed time to cut into the chronopolitics of the imposed working week to carve open another space-time for bodily expression, not on

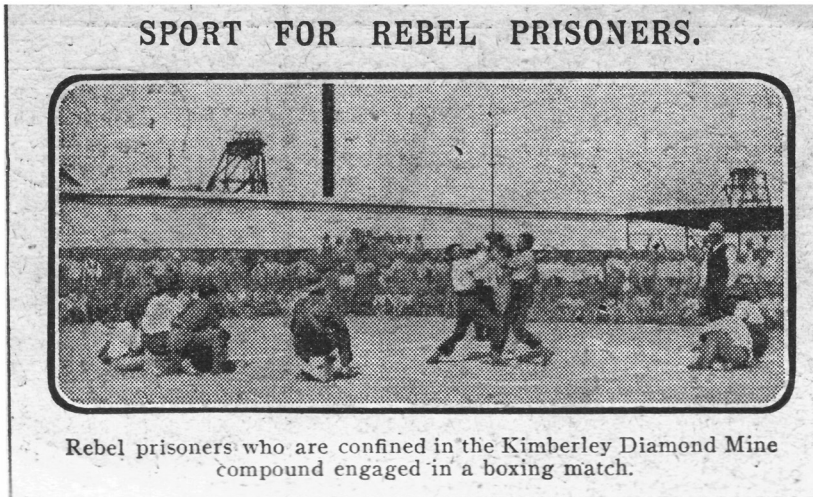


Figure 1.11

'Sport for rebel prisoners.' Source: unknown papercutting from a South African newspaper.

the terms of mine owners but on the terms of mine workers themselves (see Figure 1.11). In his study of boxing culture among the African American working classes in Chicago, Loïc Wacquant (1995: 519) describes the boxing ring as a 'space of forgetting' where fighters relocate themselves away from the strictures of everyday life (see also Dixie and Sey 2017). In a similar way, we can read the informal arrangement of bare-knuckle fighting in the mines as a deliberate act of forgetting the conditions under which mine labourers worked, making fighting an active act of deferment of the exploitative complex of the mine-mind. Fighting became a way of *refusing* the social organisation of the mine and *defusing* vexations by wedging temporal disjunctures into imperial orders.

Musangwe and other variations of bare-knuckle fights among the competing tribes were often initiated with dance rituals. While the dance rituals among fighters were individual performances, miners developed collective dances that acted both as pastime exercises and sports but also as a form of non-verbal socialising and communication. The emergence of dance as a form of insurgency within colonial rule was something that Fanon noted in his writing on the 'wretched':

In the colonised world, the colonised's affectivity is kept on edge like a running sore flinching from a caustic agent. And the psyche retracts, is obliterated, and finds an outlet through muscular spasms that have caused many an expert to classify the colonised as

hysterical ... Another aspect of the colonised's affectivity can be seen when it is drained of energy by the ecstasy of dance. Any study of the colonial world therefore must include an understanding of the phenomena of dance and possession. The colonised's way of relaxing is precisely this muscular orgy during which the most brutal aggressiveness and impulsive violence are channelled, transformed, and spirited away. The dance circle is a permissive circle. It protects and empowers. (Fanon 2004: 19–20)

Fanon's reference to the circle is interesting within a context of thinking of the mine as a portal as it suggests that the collective formation of social and protective bonds can withhold the centripetal forces of the hellish suck. It creates a protective seal against which the miners seek refuge within the brutal space of the mine.

If dancing is a way for the colonised subject to relax, to decompress under a veil of 'hysterical' 'ecstasy', the protective dance circle can also be understood as a form of opacity: a non-verbal language that expresses a communal medium of bonding incomprehensible to the coloniser (Glissant 1990). Mine dances, also known as gumboot dances, indeed emerged as forms of communication among the dancing tribes to form social bonds and collectives under the strict rules that prevented them from doing so (Muller and Topp-Fargion 1999). Mine dances entangled labourers in collective bodily performances where they could both lose themselves in collective movement and crucially find each other in a supportive collective (collectives that doubled in the mine as a mutuality of survival in shared safety and vulnerability). With a resemblance to pre-fight ritual dances, mine dances coordinate steps rhythmically, releasing dust plumes from the ground as miners clap their hands and tap their heels, boot shafts and palms, mimicking commands ordered by the white mine managers and their bossboys. Performed in lines, mine dances replicate the structure and order of the mine, connecting people in chains that extend through black holes in the ground, a safety net that enables the individuals to maintain a sense of self within the collective (Muller and Topp-Fargion 1999; Osborne 1990).

The tapping and touching of body parts in line formation emerged not as artform per se but rather out of another necessity, as a survival strategy forged deep in the mines. Mine workers were prevented from talking to each other by punitive managers and patrol officers who feared that workers organise and collectively conspire to smuggle diamonds and gold out. The end of mine-chatter brought about the birth of mine Morse code in the form of bodily touch, claps and taps (Osborne 1990). Born in the dark of the mine, mine Morse code was a subversive language that transferred information, strategised knowledge and harnessed emotion as a collectivising force. As a form of opacity par excellence (see Glissant [1990] 1997),



Figure 1.12

Miners dancing traditional dances within the mine complex, South Africa, 1960s.

Source: Ernest Cole / Magnum Photos.

mine Morse code was a fugitive tactic that sent Black souls into flight mode – within the mine and in the compound above it – and, when re-enacted before spectating audiences composed of white officers, wardens and managers alongside African mine workers, its performance carried a flinching mockery and sticky mutuality.

In this way, bare-knuckle fighting and mine dancing can be understood as non-verbal forms of expression and communication that resisted the imposition of time and space constraints on miners, opening a circular space of insurgency that counteracted the suck of the portal space. ‘Drained of energy by the ecstasy of dance,’ mine dancers performed to relax in their ‘muscular orgy’ of which ‘brutal aggressiveness’ formed a collective ‘dance circle’ that both ‘protects and empowers’ (Fanon 2004: 19–20). Fighting was performed as an act of release, not as a spectacle of violence for entertainment and consumption but as necessary sacrifice of the self to survive as a collective within the mine-mind. This has resonance with Ernest Cole’s photographic series of mine workers in *House of Bondage* that, some 60 years later, depicts ‘the black man trapped in someone else’s dream, able only to wait for the dreamer to wake or to be wakened’ (Cole 1967: 23; see also Figure 1.12). As he continues:

To relieve the tedium, a number of men participate in programs of tribal dances – the so-called “mine dancers” – which are a big tourist attraction for whites visiting Johannesburg. The dances are said to be entertainment for blacks, but the audience in the stands is strictly segregated, and somehow the dancers always end up facing the elites and showing their backs to Africans. (Cole 1967: 23–24)

Mine, Morgue, Burial Site

The forceful push and pull of the mine – its suck and the permissive circles of dance and boxing – places the mine at the boundary between life and death, making constant demands on the living and the dead. According to Maloka (1998), the boundary of life and death are deeply related to cultural practices around burial and belonging:

The natural and cultural domains are not only dialectically related, but also constantly interpenetrate each other. The human body is not simply a biological entity, but also represents history, memories, and power; hence cases of disputes over the possession and control of the body of the deceased are not unknown. (Maloka 1998: 18)

With Maloka, we might understand the geographies of the mine not only as severed through its destructive suck but also through the negotiation of the relationship between the living and the dead. Situating the mine as a site for negotiating the parameters of living (and dying) similarly features in the work of Robyn D’Avignon (2022) and Janet Adomako (2024), who, in different ways, show how gold becomes the site of negotiating with spirits and ancestors, which deeply affect how and when mining is done. Misfortune in the mines attributed to angering ancestors and ‘ritual geology’ (D’Avignon 2022) outside of the compound model came to ground these severed relations in customary sets of practices that the compound model sought to erase. Maloka documents how families, via chiefs, request the return of sick men and how without bodies, ‘fictional’ (or symbolic) burials were conducted (with friends taking items of the deceased to families to be buried in home ground). The psychic stealing of De Beers did not go unnoticed in the cultural production of songs about the mine:

A woman of witchcraft was already hard at work;
I saw her early going to the graveyard,
She puts on a string skirt fastened with knots,

She takes the arm of the corpse and waves it,
A mouthful of blood, she spits into the air,
She says, 'Men gone to DeBeers.
They can come home dead from the mines.'

(Coplan 1995: 33 quoted in Maloka 1998: 21)

The high mortality rates in the mines led to a dispossession of the dead – of their right to a proper funeral ceremony, which, in turn, fuelled the belief that white people 'took' their bodies. This practice laid the basis for the propagation of the (not historically unfounded) belief that white people, just like witches, used African body parts for medical purposes. In 1893, at a mine in Kimberley, one Mosotho reacted against what he thought to be the mutilation of their bodies: '*Koata* [a derogatory name for a quad of mine recruits] behaviour was linked to the association by many Basotho of South Africa with violence, exploitation, oppression, suffering and hatred; or, as they metaphorically put it, with "cannibals"' (Maloka 1998: 21). Cannibalism is used metaphorically, as well as empirically, to describe the reality of how miners are 'consumed' through the process of extraction (akin to June Nash's 1979 classic *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* about the intimate dependencies and exploitation in Bolivian tin mines). 'Basotho working in the mines were compared to rats boring the "holes" under the supervision of white bosses' (Maloka 1998: 22). Thus, the Basotho migrants were literally seen as making the portal for accrual and propagation of value for white subjects, at the same time as the passage of ancestral rites was being stolen.

While digging a storm drain at Kimberley in 2003, skeletal remains were uncovered from a site outside the boundary of the official cemetery. Out of the 145 graves that were unearthed, and all estimated to date from the time between 1897 and 1900, autopsies were carried out on 107 persons (86 males and 15 females), confirming that nearly all were less than 30 years of age, with their bones bearing evidence of hard physical work, interpersonal violence, amputations, scurvy, cranial fractures, infectious diseases and osteoarthritis (see Van der Merwe 2007, 2010). The bones remember a brutal sociality of the compound. While contemporaneous accounts celebrate the swimming pool, containment and a lively community, the material reality is much closer to its imaginative rendering on the Kimberley map and its philosophies of white cannibals devouring and destroying Black miners.

Lindsay Weiss (2011a) explores the relationship between the 1886 'closed labour compounds' of the South African diamond industry and the later

concentration camps of the 1899–1902 Anglo-Boer War, and the German camps used in the Herero and Nama massacre of 1904. Drawing attention to the similarities between labour camps and concentration camps, she argues that the ‘point of comparing these two forms of the camp (wartime camps and “work”-time camps) is to understand the seamlessness with which the more visible sovereign violence of the camp has long intersected with a more dispersed, biopolitical mode of state- and market-sanctioned violence’ (2011a: 21). Weiss demonstrates how the historical precedence of the labour model camp problematises the distinction between state-based murder and the necropolitics of letting workers die in the workings of De Beers mines. In the migration of the compound as a psychic and corporeal extension of the mine, the apartheid of life and death also became a site of intervention on which the material manifestation of diamonds relied. Incarcerated without rights or autonomy, at the whim of white owners and their obsessive infliction of bodily trauma under the guise of recovering thefts, the dehumanisation aspired towards totality, in what might be called death through abstraction (as native, raw or simply Black). But the reality of that imaginary could only function within a multidimensional experiment of living and its geographies. Rather than seeing the invention of forms of life outside the colonial dream in a redemptive mode – as a portal of escape, launched by the centripetal forces of collective dance, fighting and organising – we can also see it as part of the friction that facilitated the liveability and thus, in part, a return to the mine as a repeated modality of life that sustains as it depletes. ‘Dying to live’ is the aphorism applied to zama zama miners in South Africa today. The formation of the possibilities of life are based on coming through death. To refute a redemptive modality of narration poses difficult questions about how to enact reparative work without recourse to the fantasy of escape, epistemically and empirically within the portal of racial capitalism. Countering the cartography of escape is so necessary because of the deadly necropolitical structure that is sutured into racial capitalism to propel *its* dream of endless extraction. What becomes methodologically important in the scene of reparative possibilities and their deadly counterweights is to give visibility to the structures that coopt and coerce an enforced dream that originates elsewhere.

As the compound became a feature of material organisation of labour and patterns of migration in southern Africa, the architectures of the mine-prison compound have extended into the formation of ‘man camps,’ hostels, informal settlements and ‘illegal’ underground mines. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, ‘Apartheid Architectures,’ the compound became a replicable architecture for organising spatial apartheid and extraction for the generation of racial value.

Serving as a model architecture for wider extractive practices (Turrell 1984), the template of Kimberley was replicated in the compounds of the Witwatersrand gold mines: after a visit in 1903 by representatives from the Commission of Rand at Witwatersrand, the Rand managers implemented the system for indentured Chinese mine workers in 1904, and then African workers, and later in the townships (Swiegers and Wessels 2022). The compound as an extraction tool was able to incorporate different racial formations and move from diamond fields to gold reefs as an adaptable security architecture around metals, men and minerals.

The result of the visit by the Rand managers was to recommend the construction of ideal compounds (Turrell 1984: 59) based on the diamond mines that would discipline the extraction and control the value of gold. The brutal statistics of the mine deaths show that there was a 5–10 per cent African death rate in the 1890s in Transvaal, which is similar to the nearly 10 per cent death rate of African Americans in the mines around Alabama in the Southern United States at the same time (see Yusoff 2024: 343–401). In the US, the prison mine was worked by convict-lease labour; in South Africa, the compound mine was worked by both ‘free’ and convict-lease labour. The portal across colonial spaces informed the development of the ‘pioneers’ of the convict lease in Alabama and Johannesburg (in so much as Birmingham, Alabama was referred to as ‘America’s Johannesburg’ due to its use of the prison-mine complex to promote the efficacy of white supremacy through the administration of white, vagrancy, and pass laws to extract geology (see Worger 1987, 2004). Thus, the work of extraction and the weaponisation of criminality, as a racial and sexed category of psychosis that underpinned value generation, became inextricably linked. The pass laws made indenture both a condition of employment and of punishment.

In Griqualand West, for example, pass regulations were enforced through Proclamation No. 2 of 1872, and any African who contravened these regulations was either incarcerated or sentenced to corporal punishment. In 1879, Act No. 23 was passed to control vagrancy. This law stipulated that Africans contravening pass regulations could be indentured to white employers for a maximum period of three months, instead of receiving the standard sentence of a one-month imprisonment (see Swiegers and Wessels 2022: 12).

As in Britain’s other colonial spaces the question of Black labour – as Tiffany Lethabo King (2016) reminds us in the context of slavery and its afterlives – does not concern labour in the labour theory of value sense but rather fungibility, which is produced through vilification and criminalisation of the Blackness so that no claim can be made by Black subjects under white law to own the value they generate or claim autonomy of their own labour power.

The mine-prison compound shifted the psychosexual landscape, instigating the large-scale fracturing of existing social-sexual relations and cultural practices around gender and sexuality. The process of devaluation across geosocial relations was a prerequisite for the extraction of value, mobilised by the fracturing of a relationship with place, non-humans, inhuman earth, sociality and the enforcement of racial, gendered and sexed apartheid(s). The attack on the body/land relation as a psychic and geophysical space was how this was accomplished.

Conclusion

As De Beers sold in advance its annual production to a syndicate of London diamond merchants who had representatives residing in Kimberley, the diamond mines established conditions for living and dying that were specific to a racial imaginary of extraction for the consolidation of value. This chapter has attended to the racial calculus of value as a spatial entity and as a geophysical force. With reference to Equation 1, the chapter establishes the mine through its portalled suck as a site where the cannibalistic devouring of Black life and the depletion of earths create a negative space of stratal exploitation – above *and* below – that is necessary for value to surface; this is a violent passage of value through the destruction of Black life for rough diamonds to emerge as pure, cut and highly valuable goods.

As Rosalind Morris shows us in the context of the South African gold-fields: ‘That labour is more often than not invisible, ironically hidden in the bright penumbra of the gold bar ... The question is: How does one illuminate what can be so easily secreted in the light of day? How does one look for shadow, to read the trace?’ (Morris 2021: 127). As illustrated in Figures 0.3 and 0.4, shadow geologies are marked by an aesthetic of separation, where racial markers emerge as a manifestation of the geo-logics and geophysics that are materially at work in the mine. The contestation of those logics and physics does not mirror colonial deflections but dulls them to create spaces of ambiguity and transgression. Colonial aesthetics partitioned sensibility to construct geology and race as separate imaginative domains – and sought to naturalise this separability. But it is in the coming together of matter and meaning in the attrition of life – as a subterranean form of racial life – that the performance of an oppressive imaginary is made manifest as a sustained social marker. For a long time, the material narrative of diamonds in the script of value performed as excess and surplus, grotesquely unrelated to material utility (given

the violence of their surfacing). It is precisely in that illusory summoning of the violence of surfacing from the mine – as a geophysical racial act – that the diamond gained its testimony of value or authenticity. The diamond's value established a pyramid scheme where violence exercised on Black life and on earths upholds the monetary value and elusive, lustrous power of the diamond. Its value does not exist despite the violence necessary for its emergence but *because* of the violence (as per Brand in her comments on colonial pleasure as discussed in Chapter 3, 'Apartheid Architectures'): the diamond's value resides in the material evidence it carries as a trace of its violent emergence.

Against the centripetal force of the mine's suck, the chapter draws attention to the resistive embers and spores of refusal found in the intimate and everyday practices of mine workers. From engagement in staged fights to the formation of dancers, the choreography of bodies in the mine provided the vexations for and against the mine's grasp over the body and mind. By launching the body into improvised sequences – slipping, jabbing, shoving, grappling – and coordinated movement – stomps, grunts, taps and shunts – the configuration of bodies in collective formation provide a protective sheen against the pressures of the mine. With reference to Equation 2, these practices can be considered as ways of transforming the captive space of the mine into a permissive space of collective care, forging modalities of survivance from within the deepest underworlds and darkest shadows of coloniality.

In parallel to the diamond's origin story – formed deep in the earth's mantle at the *beginning* of the world, which has secured its legacy as a rock of distinction – it also has a place in what must have felt like the *end* of the world for those subject to the turbid crushing weight of its oppression. Narratives collide and stick. And so, De Beers recently refloated their slogan from 1947 – 'A diamond is forever' – to promote diamonds under the new tagline: 'How would it feel to own a million years?' (De Beers 2023), marketing the 'natural diamond' in distinction to artificially made diamonds and positing the diamond as 'Nature's Mic Drop.' The subtext goes:

The multitude of prisms and mirrors, and the colours sparkling within them, somehow tell you that this stone has a history older than anything else you will possess ... Very few men can ever possess a diamond like this one ... a unique original ... Could anything else you ever own be at once so old, so beautiful and so valuable?

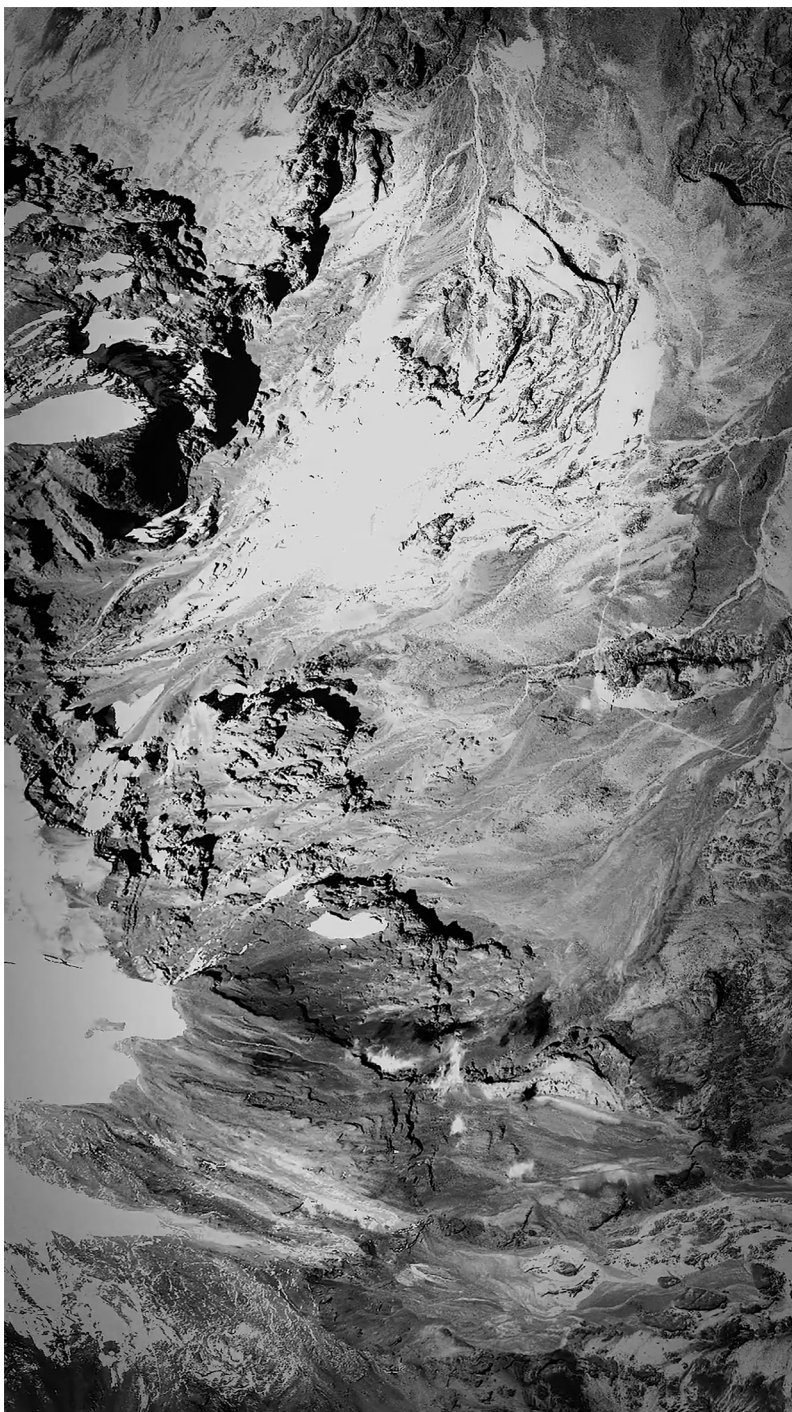
What is offered in the lustrous rock is the origins of time, secured against an excessive bedrock of racist time. As Beyoncé wore the 128.54 carat Tiffany Yellow Diamond (one of the largest yellow diamonds ever unearthed in 1878

from the Kimberley diamond mines) and Lupita Nyong'o was appointed as the first Global Ambassador to De Beers and looked out in adverts on a desert scene, reoriginating the diamond in an 'Out of Africa' imaginary, the delirium of the capture, grab and imprisonment of people, data and minds in the planetary imaginaries of the mine continues. While Beyoncé received an almost instant schooling on social media about the racial history of diamond mining, the politics of above and below are complicated by questions of racial masking and new elites.

The forceful suck of the mine that gathers migrant labour from north of South Africa continues to this day and is used by proponents to justify racial discrimination and death. For example, the Minister of Mineral Resources and Energy, Gwede Mantashe, characterised zama zama miners starved and trapped by the police in the Stilfontein mine in the government-launched Operation Vala Umgodi (plug the hole) through the violent rhetoric of criminality and the dehumanising of 'illegal' immigrants (see Morris 2025a, 2025b). Vala Umgodi refers to the action of closing all shaft entrances and exits to the mine. Transforming a mine into a tomb was about stabilising the accumulation of value, while the violent political speech of 'criminals that needed to be smoked out' gave the justification. The rhetoric and justification for the state-sponsored killings was the criminalisation of immigrants, thus reanimating the portal of South Africa's histories of racialised exploitation, demonstrating the structural condition of mining that spans across coloniality, from colonialism, settler colonialism to Apartheid and post-Apartheid and back. The mine is the machinery of empire – whose epistemic regimes were born in white geology – but the portal has many owners and the maelstrom of racialised poverty continues. Which is to say that a country can throw off the white supremacist state but if it does not address the conditions of its extractions and how those extractions undermine the possibilities of environmental relations then it remains stuck in a portal of coloniality.

In conclusion, by drawing attention to the mine as a site of colonial transformation of space and time in the service of surfacing value, this chapter has developed an understanding of the mine as a portal in three discrete acts: (1) The centripetal force that sucks into its geography, geological matter and 'wandering' labour to drain 'value' from the environment and produce racial regimes of power – diamond power; (2) the geophysical transformation of environments produces a racial dynamic of above and below that mirrors the proxy/prism of value in the theft of land, labour and geological matter, and is used to justify violence of the most extreme kind; (3) finally, the stratal dynamics of race and value are kept constant through an infrastructural

complex that in various architectural forms – the model compound and, as will become evident in Chapter 3, ‘Apartheid Architectures,’ the hut and the high-rise too – deflects the imaginaries of extraction elsewhere to the physical structures of dispossession. When conceived of as a portal, the mine is the geographical reality of stealing as a form of forgetting that becomes diffracted through the prism of imaginaries that reflect back and reflect away from the material conditions of racialised and environmental harm. The geographical imaginary carries the material transformations, wherein the portal is a bore-hole into the earth and a psychic drill into the ground of relation that mines all around. The material sublimation of diamondiferous ‘blue ground’ in the diamond is a compression of value below and above ground, where fugitivity within the suck of these relations of dispossession becomes a stealing, a fight, a dance and another dream of belonging to the earth in life and death.



2

Mimesis and Madness

If you want to locate the hegemonic home of liberal logics and aspirations, look to love in the settler economies. (Povinelli 2006: 17)

In the 1950s and 60s Gladys Babson Hannaford travelled across the US selling diamonds. In the decades following the Second World War, Hannaford worked out of the Diamond Information Centre based in New York, which was a subsidiary of De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd and the Madison Avenue advertising agency NW Ayer and Son. She travelled the US delivering lectures to jewellers and geological societies, as well as the public, about how to sell diamonds to women. Hannaford looked like an archetypal American grandmother (see Figure 2.1). She was widowed during the war and never remarried. Her image as a pillar of heteropatriarchy seemed (in the narrative affect) a million miles away from the industry she worked for and the dream she was peddling. Working on behalf of De Beers, Hannaford represented one of the most successful industrial cartels in the world, a company originally spearheaded by Cecil Rhodes that for decades had held an almost total monopoly over the diamond trade worldwide. De Beers owned the largest diamond-producing mines in the world, mainly in South Africa but also in Namibia and Lesotho, and in London, the company operated under the Diamond Trading Company to set the value and trade of diamonds globally. Hannaford's reassuring image to white settlers offered a soft portal to an extractive industry that had systematically displaced and dehumanised Black and Indigenous communities across southern Africa and continued throughout the 20th century to hold an iron grip on international trade. Carrying the blue-bound marketing materials produced by De Beers – from blue ground to blue bound (see Figure 2.2) – Hannaford promoted the famous NW Ayer and Son campaign 'a diamond is forever' that yoked into popular culture in the titular James Bond movie and Shirley Bassey's infamous song, as well as the Marilyn Monroe movie



Figure 2.1

Photograph of Gladys Babson Hannaford. Source: *How to Sell Diamonds* (Chiltern Company, 1959).

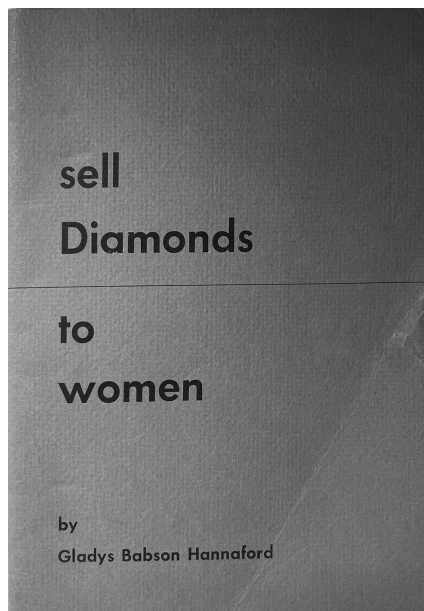


Figure 2.2

The Blue Book, an instruction manual on how to sell diamonds to women for diamond traders travelling across the USA. Source: G. B. Hannaford, *How to Sell Diamonds to Women* (New York: De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd, 1962).

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes and its revealing song 'Diamonds Are a Girls Best Friend' about the gendered relations baked into the NW Ayer and Son campaign. 'Diamonds' was sung by a glittering Monroe in a performance that sees her in a pink silk evening dress resisting the advances of dozens of men in tuxedos offering her diamonds.

Hannaford always received a warm welcome in local newspapers, which announced her arrival in terms of the value of the gems she was carrying and the message she was conveying: 'There's the tradition in a very few words. Love endures forever. A diamond is forever. So the diamond is the symbol of enduring love' (De Beers Consolidated Mines Ltd 1970: 4). The significance of the 'a diamond is forever' campaign is that it crystallised in the public imagination the diamond as the ultimate symbol of heterosexual love and the disciplining and consecration of sexuality in heteropatriarchy. Campaign advertising further entrenched the gendered economy of patriarchal, racial capitalism at a tumultuous time in US history, and indeed in the history of the West: the post-Second World War renewal years. The engagement ring ritualised, and normalised, the conjugal spatialised contract between binary genders in the growth of racial capitalism, in which white men performed as single earners in the family and white women took care of the domestic realm (in the postwar respatialisation of women's roles in social reproduction).

The engagement ring and its representational power act as a portal through which the coordinates of heterosexual sex, gender and intimacy that sustained the extraction of diamondiferous earth from southern Africa reverberate through time. The story of the diamond, and the 'romance of the stone', continually invisibilises the Black subjection that made the fantasy of white love possible in the late 1800s, the mid-1900s and through to today's matrices of extraction, wealth and social reproduction (explored in Chapter 5, 'Data Dreams', on data science and artificial intelligence). In maintaining the allure and manufactured scarcity of diamonds over time, De Beers and NW Ayer and Son performed the delicate act of marrying economic control to sexual desire and marital fantasy. This relationship produced its own 'cruel optimism' (Berlant 2011) in striving to achieve the ideals of intimacy within the constraints of white domesticity and normative social reproduction, while the erotic charge of the diamond's origins in brutal racialised undergrounds raised the prospect of white love above its conditions of production as a parallel symbolic achievement of white supremacy. While the previous chapter developed the portal as a decomposing *suck*, this chapter draws attention to the psychosocial *swirl* that both gestures towards the madness

and suicide that threatened the stability of mining in the 19th century and the sexual economy that surrounds the global distribution of cut diamonds, offering a promise of achieving white heteropatriarchal supremacy through its ownership.

This chapter explores two critical cartographies of this *swirling* diamond power that tie together love, madness, race and gender on the Kimberley diamond fields and in the diamond engagement ring through the lens of mimesis and madness. It uses the concept of mimesis, developed by Michael Taussig (1993) to understand how mimicry and alterity operate in tandem in the reproduction of colonial power and the psychosis of colonialism. Olive Schreiner, the protofeminist writer who witnessed first hand the racial violence at the Kimberley mines, presciently described how the social orders of the extraction industry wrought the South African nation, not as an effect of colonial political economy but as constitutive of it. Following an examination of the prescriptive geographies of gendered settler roles, the discussion moves on to (white) madness at the mine. This spurred an impetus to consolidate and monopolise ownership, providing a turning point in the organisation of labour towards the destruction of African sociality through the severing of social and sexual relations in the service of the establishment of power and the explicit rise of white supremacy as the organising logic of South African society. Cleansing the muddled minds of white men induced the psychosis of colonialism explicated by Fanon (2008) in his examination of the cognitive dissonance of colonial power in forging the world in its own image, transforming bodies and environments into a resource that had a psychological cost for both the oppressed and oppressor. That is, Fanon understood that what was accumulated above (as white supremacy) must also take into account what is below (the subconscious sublimation of oppression). Understanding cognitive dissonance, as Fanon (2008) applies it, provides an astute reading of the psychological toll of the attempt to destroy intimacy and love on the diamond fields.

Returning to the gendered economies of the mine compound that attempted to end social and sexual relations through the organisation of male-only labour, the discussion turns to the generation of new expressions of intimacy to mediate the colonial violence of extraction and the racial subjection of its sexualised disciplining. Intimacy among men characterised life in the labour camps as an on-going sexual sedimentation of extraction and form of re-establishing relations. Black women, enlisted into domestic servitude or living in settler townships, were invisibilised in this process

and yet they occupied the centre of social reproduction and the overlooked reinvention of forms of sex and desire. Despite being largely absented from historical records, Black women were key to both maintaining and resisting colonial domesticity and reorganising urban socialities in how they practised both care and discordance in close quarters (for example, see the role of the character Leah, the shebeen queen in Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy*, where the protagonist Xuma finds the bonds of community, love and a hotbed of politics amidst the racial tensions of Johannesburg).

In conclusion, the chapter returns to the engagement ring, showing how the diamond, in its refracted light and prism of social-sexual relations, configured post-Second World War society in the ideation of white supremacist extraction societies as a racially inverted diagram of wealth and environmental-racial deficit. In the mid-20th century, the engagement ring launched a geographical imaginary that incorporated nation-building and the expansion of capitalism into zones of intimacy (and marriage as the stabilising normative unit of value in white heteropatriarchy that structured racist capitalism), recalibrating the balance between superstructure and base in the renewal of liberal democracy. The engagement ring was promoted as the symbol of everlasting love (the settlement of sexual ownership) and financial value (and tied the two together). The ring hailed an ideal type of citizenry that adhered to codes of conduct around gender and sexuality in the service of social reproduction, commercial growth and the political stability of the white nation state. Wearers of the ring could look to their technicolour futures filled with the material pleasures afforded by financial comfort and ease brought about by those that laboured in the mines of racial deficit (in America and South Africa). Advertising strategically disguised the violent history of diamond extraction and monopolistic management of global trade that co-produced each other. Hannaford steps into the portal to sell diamonds to women, which involves selling the American dream of white comfort (financial and intimate) facing a world of settler uncertainty and danger (see Figure 2.2). The diamond in this affective arrangement demonstrates how the fantasies of white supremacy are produced through violent materialities and their endurance. These aesthetic acts of diamond power, encapsulated in the engagement ring, propel the expansion of white heteronormativity as a portal in the extension of settler infrastructures in America and South Africa. The swirling propulsion of the portal claims a stake into the future, where the diamond inserted into the marriage contract is a contraction of the large claims of the white settler state and the shared material pathology of those geographies and geologies.

Love on the Diamond Fields

You are made for labour, not for love. (St John Rivers to Jane Eyre in proposing she marry him and become a missionary wife, taken from Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, 1847)

For emigrating white women, life in the settler societies of southern Africa was determined by the labour of making stolen land productive and profitable. Charlotte Brontë's eponymous heroine Jane Eyre understands this prospect in rejecting the marriage advances of St John Rivers. She understands that the marriage proposal is not made out of love, but that she represents a hardworking female body capable of social reproduction. Young women of working-class means were actively recruited by emigrating societies to join the colonial project as compliant wives, and while they were drawn into the romantic imaginaries of carving out a life in the new territory, they faced a life of hardship in trying to fulfil this imaginary. Olive Schreiner, the South African writer, wrote about her experiences and the expectations of being a settler women in South Africa. Born in 1855 in Wittenberg, a remote missionary outpost in the eastern Cape, Schreiner was almost entirely self-taught and became a prominent sociological writer of the settler colonial experience in South Africa. She grew up in an era of colonial extraction that had accelerated during the closing decades of the 19th century with the discovery of diamonds and gold, which typified the most profitable of a range of extractive industries in metals and minerals. As a young adult, Schreiner lived for a time at Kimberley, the centre of diamond mining; the dry climate eased her asthma. She witnessed first hand the 'diabolical architectures' (Trollope 1878: 177) of the Kimberley mines and concluded that by warping the land, the Rand Lords, who held concentrated power and wealth in their hands, had wrought a sick society riven with racial violence and unrestrained greed.

Schreiner had a complicated relationship with Cecil Rhodes, having nurtured a deep friendship with him, often visiting him in Kimberley and at his residence, Groote Schuur, in the Cape Flats. However, she fiercely disagreed with Rhodes on matters of race and social justice (see Meredith 2007: 262) and came to the belief that 'fixing' the land meant wrangling control from Rhodes and the other Rand Lords (see Introduction, letter written to John Xavier Merriman,¹ where Schreiner expresses her abhorrence of Cecil Rhodes and

¹ Merriman was a noted politician who served in Rhodes's government when he was elected Prime Minister of the Cape Colony.

spells out why he should be resisted). For Schreiner, peering down into the open mine at Kimberley was like looking into the speculative future of South Africa. As she writes in her first novel, *Undine: A Queer Little Child* (1929), of entering down the Kimberley Mine:

It was like entering the city of the dead in the land of the living, so quiet it was, so well did the high-piled gravel heaps keep out all sound of the seething noisy world around. Not a sound, not a movement. (Schreiner quoted in Meredith 2007: 255)

Like a tomb, the mine represented the chronic twisted pain of warped and interconnected geological and social orders that she anticipated would shape the nascent territory for decades to come. In her posthumously published novel *From Man to Man, or Perhaps Only* (2015), Schreiner explored race, gender and the sexual economies of South African society against the backdrop to the diamond industry through the story of two sisters whose lives diverge as one becomes a sex worker and the other an intellectual. Schreiner saw herself vacillate between these two identities of womanhood, and experienced throughout her adult life being bound by patriarchy and colonialism.

Schreiner followed her brother and sister to Kimberley in the early 1870s when diamond prospecting was at fever pitch. She observed patterns of white 'diggers' gathered around the rim of the mine who did no digging. Instead, they patrolled the rim to watch as Black labourers moved up and down and across the treacherously unstable open mine.

Those who were called 'diggers' at New Rush [the largest of the Kimberley diamond mines] were nothing of the kind. The diggers were white but did no digging: the men who actually dug were black. At the same time, Africans were violently denied possession of the diamonds they dug from the earth. A law was quickly rushed into force by the white invaders: no African would ever be allowed to own, buy or sell a single diamond. (McClintock 1995: 275)

Dispossession was enacted at a geographical level in the theft of land and at a geological level through the ownership of minerals; both geographical and geological colonial regimes indelibly marked the flesh and expression of sociality and sexuality. The harsh life on the diamond fields contradicted how it was recorded in photographs that celebrated the mining industry and its technological feats (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, architectures and technologies narrated as signs of progress were used to provide a neutralising discourse for assuming 'natural' authority over Black and Indigenous peoples). Women dot the background in the historical photographs of

mines, providing an approving, rarefied audience to the introduction of new machinery in the steady consolidation of the extraction industries. Settler women across the colonies have historically performed a 'settling' function in normalising the vision of colonialism, absorbing the violence of extraction and its masculinities while relying on the subjugation of Black women who did the actual labour of social reproduction. Lined up in the background of photographs produced for foreign investors were settler women standing in Victorian dress, their silhouettes distinguished by long ruffled skirts and corsets buttoned up to the neck (Figure 2.3). Despite the stifling heat of the South African bushveld, they appear neatly assembled to silently witness the new machine for washing rock or pumping water, providing a 'civilising' nod to settler life and the aspirational ideas that progress and commerce were taking place in the distant reaches of the empire. Rall (2002) wrote of these women



Figure 2.3

Central companies' washing gear, 1880s. Source: N6991, Verrey album, from K. Duminy and R. J. L. Sabatini, *Fifty Years on the Diamond Mines* (Kimberley: Africana Library, 2007).

as 'petticoat pioneers' because they serviced the domesticity of the diamond fields and modelled the dreams of empire through their attention to Victorian codes of dress and decorum. The role of witness to masculine achievement and social-sexual reproduction of that muscularity was the labour accorded to women. The domestic as a genre provided an affective infrastructure that secured the normative frame of settler colonialism and its claims to the geo-social formations of extraction and its racial conditions of spatial forms.

Schreiner struggled against this public display of virtue and was determined in her writing to reveal the psychological injury of forging settler life. Women were silenced and consigned to support the colonial efforts through the ideals of an unattainable domesticity. In her most famous novel, *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), Schreiner documented the precarious mortality, moral indignation and emotional suffering that affected white women living in South Africa's interior (without Indigenous knowledge or connection to that environment). For Schreiner, women were doomed to failure and suffering in their attempts to realise colonial domesticity and its ideals of social reproduction. While they lived as aliens in a foreign land, the racialised brutality of carving out the homestead would never lead to a harmonious environment. The normalisation of displacement and dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples that existed all around the homestead disrupted and sedimented the colonial imaginary by gaining furtive entry in the domestic sphere through the gendered logics of care and refusal practised by both white and Black women. Anne McClintock (1995: 270) notes how Schreiner characterised the Black women who raised white babies and took care of household chores as powerful in fracturing colonial identity: 'white children – nursed, tended, caressed and punished by black maids and nurses – receive the memory of black women's power as an ambiguous heritage'. White colonial settlers, as Schreiner described them, were deeply unsettled by witnessing all around them the remnants of worlds other than their own having been swept away, and they dreamt of a whiteness, free of dependence on the *other*, to run the household (while other accounts relish this intimate violence for the thin sense of supremacy that it brought).

Living in South Africa was a decidedly inhospitable experience for Schreiner. The drive to produce a colonial imaginary that mimicked with ease the bucolic English village meant that gendered subjectivity and relations, sexual desires and mores were performed in the highly siloed, rigid aspirations of a romantic Victorian whiteness. Schreiner defied these constraints, exploring her own existence and that of her parents and siblings through the

lens of mental anguish; she wrote of the domestic realm as a prison in which the settler state of mind anxiously rattled around and yearned to escape. Rationalising the Schreiner family's existence in South Africa was based on two fictive claims that invented the settler space: first, there was the claim that cohesive social formations that were indigenous and traditional had pre-existed in the space, and they needed to change for the better through religious education and the organisation of labour. Second, that settler subjectivity (gender, sexuality, class, race) was formed in siloed categories that rubbed up against each other but were definitively separate to indigenous being and, again, pre-existed the imperial world – the imperial world was simply cast as a canvas upon which already existing identities and ways of life were drawn, with one replacing the other, white replacing, but dependant on, Black. These two fictive claims, performed through the racial and gendered divisions and hierarchies of the domestic realm, were part of a white fragility that was constantly felt to be at risk of the violence and chaos of the outside colonial world crashing in. The negotiation between the anxiety of settlement and the retroactive forces it generated to compensate for that continuous unsettling propelled settler infrastructures into the future. McClintock (1995) illustrates how glass served as a metaphor in Schreiner's work for both social status (owning glass was a sign of wealth) and the limitations of female subjectivity. In *The Story of an African Farm*, glass is regularly used as a metaphor to separate female characters from the outside world. Sat by windowpanes, female characters peered out to a world they can see but cannot (it is narrated) participate in or change (see also Chapter 4, 'Red Lines, White Spots' for the parallel portal of the railway as a passage through and settling of 'civilisation'). Irigaray's (1984) proposition that patriarchal capitalism had historically assigned masculinity to time and femininity to space applies to Schreiner's writing of gender relations in settler societies. Men were largely absent from the homestead in pursuit of commercial opportunities or administrative duties that were considered progressive and conducted in the spirit of mastering colonial time, transforming South African earth into resource, and into private wealth. White women were exempt from mastering time and bound to the calculative logics of colonial space, performing to the ideals of social reproduction in the formation of settler societies. As discussed later in this chapter, changing the spatial and temporal coordinates of coloniality was often furtively accomplished by Black maids, beer-brewing shebeens and mine labourers in retooling the conditions that oppressed them (as well as producing affective and spatial infrastructures that were not subjected to the sole coordinates of settler time, making life and liveability, community and care outside white supremacist visions).

Aristocratic women took control in building settler societies in the image of Victorian England, for which they depended on the labour of working-class women to emigrate and reproduce. This aspiration is exemplified by Edith Lyttleton Gell, the wife of Phillip Lyttleton Gell, a politician and businessman heavily involved in the British South Africa Company (BSAC) as director, president and, eventually, chair. Edith Lyttleton Gell was committed to her husband's imperial endeavours,² and through her involvement in the British Women's Emigration Society and as chair of the South African Emigration Expansion Committee (1901–1904), she vetted and secured the emigration of young working-class women to southern Africa. A strong supporter of conservative family values, she sought to address a deficit in women of reproductive age in populating settler societies. By encouraging the emigration of young women to colonial South Africa, Gell aimed to ensure that the values of Victorian England would structure the moral economy of colonial society. Social engineering through marriage would prove a stabilising force in allying domestic life to industrial progress, exerting a Weberian ([1901] 2001) understanding that the configuration of societal norms and values – a Protestant ethic – was foundational to industrial progress. Gell helped run the Salisbury Hostel in Bulawayo, a major settler town in what is now Zimbabwe, that received women from England to propel a sexual economy of marriage that would sediment the surplus of white men working in colonial administrative enterprises into a permanent structure of heteropatriarchal settler society. Colonialism was not simply an economic aim, but to accomplish Rhodes's dream, there needed to be a mode of social reproduction through which morality and conduct reflecting Victorian culture were replicated (where morality was a core affect in the narrating of white settlerism; see also Rhodes's reconfiguring of the Groote Schuur estate in the ideals of the English garden, discussed in Chapter 4, 'Red Lines, White Spots').

The domestic realm emerged as a site of mimesis and fracture in colonial South Africa through which binary gendered identity was configured in relationship to the shadow geologies of extraction and severance that both consolidated and splintered the colonial subject. While Schreiner located the frustrations of women in their struggle to embody colonial ideology, McClintock (1995: 275–277) points out that Schreiner herself was limited in understanding the role and power of Black South African women in shaping the colonial domestic setting and fracturing its mimetic aspirations.

² Derbyshire Record Office, Matlock, Derbyshire, Papers of the Gell family of Hopton Hall, D3287/19 Box 19.

Madness at the Mine

In an 1883 letter to Merriman, Rhodes complained of an epidemic of suicides at the Kimberley Mine. 'The suicidal mania is seizing the community, here we buried poor Scholtz this morning. I am afraid this will not be the last, the doctors say it is almost like an epidemic.' The tone of Rhodes's announcement betrays a sense of resignation that suicides occur with some regularity at Kimberley, and he assigns their cause to the slim profit margins of the diamond trade. 'I do not despair of the place,' he writes,

as the wealth in diamonds, if regulated, must eventually become a source of profit to the holders instead of as at present being chucked away for the benefit of home consumers. Last month 320,000 carats left this place. The yield is as good as ever but at present rates, leaves no margin. Bad as things are, fancy S. Africa without railway works going on and without this £300,000 per month of diamond export worked so unprofitably that the results are all distributed in the country in return for labour, fuel, food etc. and nothing is left to be remitted to home shareholders or shared by bankrupt colonial ones. (Letters and papers relating to Cecil Rhodes, Rhodes Family Papers at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s.1804)

Men were going mad at the mine, yet Rhodes did not blame Kimberley; the earth rich in diamondiferous rock was deemed innocent and passive in the procession of history. Instead, Rhodes adopted a materialist approach to changing the political economy – seeing that the economic order of the land and its mineral wealth were coupled to the mental stability of the men who invested their fortunes at the diamond fields. The appeal that Rhodes makes is to the maintenance of exports and the continuance of establishing railways (the planetary portals of *suck* and *extension*) to consolidate stability and psychosis. Men from around the world arrived in Kimberley to speculate whatever money they had on the prospect of finding diamonds. Uncertainty clouded the potential for good returns once the infrastructural, labour and subsistence costs were accounted for. In addition, the value of the stone fluctuated wildly on the international markets and a black market in gemstones flourished. Yet, the enticement of vast wealth was worth the gamble for many prospectors and proof that the 'hardships' of colonial life in southern Africa could be overcome.

As discussed in Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine', the diamond fields at Kimberley were made up of three pipes, shaped like funnels lined with diamondiferous rock extending deep into the earth. Kimberley was unusual in an excitable way because the diamonds were not effluvial, found in rivers like in the other great diamond-rich regions in Brazil and India.

Diamonds literally exploded from and in the earth. They were abundant, igniting the diamond rush among white settlers to secure claims and start digging. Yet, in Rhodes's eyes, abundance brought its own problems, in terms of the expense of paying for labour and supplies, technical limitations – such as the lack of mechanisation and efficiency – and theft, or perceived theft, by Black diggers that cumulatively dissolved any potential returns on investment. The insatiable land grab to find diamonds was a problem that sent men mad, the narrative went. A madness attributed to a breakdown in the extractive model of racial capitalism whereby the violence to accumulation ratio was not satisfied. The panacea to this catalogue of problems, which included an epidemic of suicides, was the consolidation of ownership. Throughout the 1870s, Rhodes, alongside other Rand Lords, engaged in fierce competition with each other in buying up claims and merging ownership of the mines. The muddled minds of white men, reflected in the chaos of Kimberley mines, would be cleared, thought Rhodes, through the consolidation of claims and the organised control over labour and infrastructure.

Claim owners had for a long time recruited labour from the neighbouring communities, classified under the racial terminology of 'natives' and of whom they were deeply suspicious of stealing diamonds (see Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine' and the role of invasive sexual methods of searching). Through a succession of decrees and laws issued by the British Crown, Indigenous people had been denied any form of ownership in the business of diamond mining (Smallberger 1976).

By the actions of the government not only does disorder and confusion reign in the camp, but the disallowing of our rules ... but by issuing licenses to dig for diamonds to coloured persons of more than one fourth black blood – an act totally opposed to the diggers' regulations, a pretext is given by which our native servants can wrongfully and unlawfully dispose of our property. (The Statute Law of Griqualand West 1882 quoted in Smallberger 1976: 421)

In the early years of the diamond rush (from the late 1860s to mid-1870s), ownership of claims in the mines was regulated by numerous unionised stakeholders including Cornish and Australia miners and the Boers (who originally farmed the land), and it was administrated by the British Crown Colonial Office in its annexation over Griqualand West – the territory that contained diamondiferous earth. In 1872, the Colonial Secretary wrote in support of white ownership and the refusal of local ownership as a matter of vital importance to maintaining colonial power. If local ownership was permitted, it could potentially undermine the colonial project in southern Africa and beyond.

It would almost impossible for white men to compete with natives as diggers; the mere difference between their living expenses, the cost of passage abroad, the rates at which natives would sell their diamonds, and in fact, not to argue further upon a truism, the difference between the general wants, necessities, character and position of the two races, utterly forbid it. (A. F. Lindley in a letter to the *Diamond News*, 1872 quoted in Smallberger 1976: 423)

The threat of local ownership destabilising an already precarious business led to the introduction of administrative laws to manage and monitor the 'native' population at Kimberley. The colour line in South Africa was being drawn in the microcosm of the Kimberley mines through the organisation of labour and claim ownership. Officers were appointed to administer the soft infrastructure of paperwork, in the form of registries, licence agreements and pass laws, that was introduced in response to concerns about restricting Black people from owning claims and bolstering the proprietorship of settlers and white prospectors so that labour power could be commercialised and standardised. Increased regulation was introduced to audit the distribution of licences to explicitly exclude Black people; this involved creating a measure of skin colour ('four-fifths black blood') that within 70 years would translate into the Apartheid pass laws and its colourism. Counting also became something of a preoccupation of administrators in tracking and tracing the number of workers migrating to and digging in the mines.³ The language of administration mirrored that used during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, with local diggers referred to as servants and their labour power captured in statistical representations in ledgers that rendered them a material resource organised mimetically to ensure that their productive capacity was optimised and in continual use.

The Servant's Registry was established by the British Crown government and installed at the Cape Colony in 1872. Claim owners were responsible for registering the labourers that worked for them and who they traded with, a measure intended to exclude Black ownership and to prevent Black-run

³ Records at the Royal Geographical Society contain a catalogue of local peoples that worked at the mines classified by tribal identity and heritage. These Indigenous populations were classified under the label 'native,' a designation that was applied across the bureaucratic spheres governing the mines, including mortality rates, service record and place of origin. Royal Geographical Society Library, A135 Tribespeople, Africa (including South Africa), c. 1940.

businesses from taking hold. For the next decade, quarrels regularly broke out about the integrity of the records and the truthfulness of claim owners in a fraught environment driven by intense competition. Complaints were made to the Cape government that licensed claim owners were not complying with the new laws in declaring 'servants' and that they continued to trade with Black business owners, which called for more law enforcement to be assigned at extra cost to the governing administration. Easing the minds of early diamond prospectors so that they were not driven to suicide required the practical organisation of and attempts to settle economies of sex, gender and social reproduction in relation to classifications of race and racial capacities, treating identities as abstract categories mapped onto the landscape of extraction. Resolving these tensions, according to colonial administrators, was just a matter of finding the right geometry – which Rhodes took credit for in generating profits. A bureaucratic architecture was necessary to stave off madness and keep the mouth of the Kimberley diamond mines open for future extraction. Madness opens a swirling portal from the iron cage of bureaucracy to the iron cavern of perception. The foregrounding of white health in the context of extraction pushed the brutal environmental and psychotic conditions inflicted on Indigenous populations during the 'boom' into the background, treating them as an operational challenge of labour flow that bureaucracy would solve.

The organisation of race and social reproduction into administrative concepts that functioned within a white space produced what Fanon (2008) observed as the psychic pain of colonialism, which pronounces itself as a psychotic break that configures Blackness in a white world, a siloed concept that is manipulable and productive. Racial capitalism converges the geometry of race in the consolidation of extraction into what appears as a rationalised industry that slots neatly into global production and trade networks. Yet achieving this calculable state meant violently carving out a white world and, within it, Black subjection that would, as Schreiner observed, continue for decades. Even in categories of the other, Black South Africans were expected to perform to the geographical imaginaries of the colonial powers that constrained them, denying them the very forms of pleasure, love and social reproduction that colonial extraction relied on. Black labourers, who did all the digging, were housed in man camps that severed their relational bonds and kinship networks. The labour camps enforced a form of social castration where men were deprived of their sexual and relational freedom within a heterosexual context.

Mine Love

Understanding the complexities of colonisation requires recognition of diverse forms of responses to make life liveable and an engagement with the double bind of alterity that takes shape under conditions of oppression to produce new social and sexual relations. Forms of intimacy that made life tolerable, rather than being produced as an effect of the racialised brutalities of colonial extraction, were constitutive of it. At the same time, such intimacies created space in the register of flattened lives and thus dimensions of possibility and forms of experience that rescripted imposed conditions.

As described in Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine', the labour and internment camps were built on the edges of Kimberley to segregate white and Black mine workers. The Servant's Registry monitored the migration and deployment of predominantly Black and indentured labour to the consolidated mines and various other infrastructural projects under construction in the expansion of colonial annexation. Once De Beers conglomerated their control over all three diamond pipes at Kimberley, they built Kenilworth for white workers and their families. Modelled on the English village, Kenilworth was composed of tree-lined streets, rows of brick bungalows with verandas and fruit trees (supplied by the Company), a swimming pool and a club house (Storey 2015). Kenilworth was built as a different kind of model village, built to protect the privacy of De Beers employees and enable them to raise families and enjoy a rural life (Williams 1905: 113–118). In opposition, Weiss (2011b) describes the Black labour camp as similar to an internment prison that housed migrant and indentured workers in cramped dormitories under the close surveillance of wardens and supervisors. In her archaeology of the labour camps at Kimberley, Weiss (2011b) documented evidence of marital unions between male labourers. Older men would take younger, newer labourers as their 'wife' or sexual partner, named *mataamyola* in mine talk (Cole 1967: 24), enacting a ceremony that acknowledged the union and established a marital bond in which sex, gifting, companionship, care and support were reciprocated.

Provocatively, it was the very environment that was to reconfigure intimate social and sexual life in an entirely nonreproductive context that rendered this enactment of connubial-style sexual relations a profoundly destabilising set of practices. The system of taking on young men as wives (*nkhon-txana*) afforded an array of domestic services (the younger wife being expected to cook and wash clothing) and intimate pleasures, producing a monogamous and affectionate marriage. (Weiss 2011b: 58)

Weiss describes the kinds of intimacies, 'mine-love,' that took shape to mediate new forms of social reproduction that would previously have been gendered. Yet, she does not comment on the extent to which abuse, assault and harassment defined male-to-male relationships, nor on the forms of consent im/possible under subjugating conditions in the context of dehumanising conditions. The official archives we consulted tell us little about the pains and pleasures of these intimacies, but, as Weiss documents, younger men would offer sexual services alongside completing other domestic practices like washing, cooking and care, in exchange for learning the ways of the camps, where and how to get things, how to cope with the everyday mundanity of back-breaking labour in the mines, and the cramped carceral conditions of the dormitories. Everyday commodities sold to labourers, including soap and blankets, were rematerialised in the intimacies of marriage. Soap was typically associated with European mores of cleanliness and civility in opposition to the oils and earth used by Indigenous peoples for cleansing. Soap circulated in the labour camps and accumulated other meanings in intimate washing rituals and sexual pleasure. Blankets allowed married couples to stage an illusion of privacy in the cramped dormitories, when the whole of compound life – from the inception of naked and intrusive medical inspections to finger printing and biometric identification of passes – sought to rob subjects of their right and claim to privacy. As Ernest Cole comments in his text with accompanying photographs taken inside mine compounds, '[t]he most privacy a man can get is to hang a blanket in front of his bunk' (Cole 1967: 23). Weiss (2011b) points out that intimate practices were realised through the exchange of material objects made available in the camps. Paradoxically, labourers used these objects to perform rituals associated with Christian marriage, both enacting and subverting the heteronormativity of marriage and social reproduction that colonial domesticity emulated.

The mine labour camps stood in opposition to the white villages that were architecturally designed to draw the line between public and private life, assigning pleasure and intimacy to the private domicile. In the mine labour camps love was performed and consummated in public, and no line between public and private was established in the biopolitical planning of the camps. As Weiss continues, the relationships that developed between male labourers were not singularly about gaining sexual pleasure: 'The solace provided in these ritualised and coded intimacies ... offered an assuaging of psychological brittleness that emerged in the wake of these extended periods of totally rote and dehumanising schedules and spaces' (2011b: 58).

Men were denied the consideration of sexuality while working in the mines, their biopolitical value lodged in the maximisation of their labour in

geographical proximity to the mine. Away from the mine, while hauled up in the camps, men married to make the carceral conditions liveable while at the same time exploring different kinds of sexuality, fluidities and desires. The 'currencies of intimacy,' a term devised by Weiss (2011b), subverted heteronormative relationships and sexual pleasure. While dismissed by wardens and administrators at De Beers, such intimacies made room for forms of sociality that were already at work in the mutuality of mine (as a material practice that cannot be done alone and in which safety is a communal responsibility). Despite attempts to forge colonial domesticity through the cultural norm that married people conjugate in the private realm of the home, 'in the early days of the late 19th century diamond rush, sexuality and intimate enactments, by architectural and environmental necessity, unfolded largely outside of the domestic proprieties of the conventional Victorian domicile' (Weiss 2011b: 50). Away from the camps, returning to their homes, the biopolitical value of mine labourers diminished. While men were forced into migrant labour, moving away from their home villages for long stretches of time, their return was unmarked by colonial authorities. This gave way to liminal spaces in rural communities and the new urban settlements in which diverse and indifferent forms of sociality, economic exchange and sexual practices emerged.

Mimetic Wombs

African mothers have been overlooked, their role ignored, despite the fact that never before has a modern economic system so extensively and brutally plundered the wombs of black women. (Verges 2020: 51)

We argue for recognition of the centrality of reproduction to racial capitalism but also for recognition of reproduction as to the principal site and stake when racial capitalism is contested, challenged, or radically refused by those whose reproductive labour and products are exploited, extracted, and dispossessed. (Morgan and Weinbaum 2024: 11)

The story of Black South African women is constructed in binary terms in relation to what was happening to African men. As men were recruited and coerced into the migrant and transient labour forces that powered colonial extraction and infrastructural extension across the continent, the script of women is that they were left abandoned in the rural, ancestral communities or forced to live in informal settlements on the edges of the burgeoning colonial

towns (Jeater 2020). Women are narrated as falling into poverty or being displaced from their land and rounded up into townships to allow for more fertile lands to be annexed into farmland. The story of South African women is told as an afterstory, plotted in the wake of heteropatriarchal settler colonialism and the transformation of land and bodies into resources. When they appear in historic records, which is seldom, women were recorded as passive and their bodies as the mimetic devices of the colonial enterprise in the reproduction of manual or service labour. This is evident in the records of early ethnographers, missionaries and public health officials that entered the villages and townships. Ethnographers headed for the 'tribe' in studying the origins of Man [sic], whereas the missionaries and public health inspectors dispersed across the British Empire sought to induce change through education and the management of reproduction. As Nancy Rose Hunt (1999) argues in her study of birth rituals in Congo, a colonial lexicon developed through the exchange of material objects such as soap and weighing scales, which was used in gaining control over the practices and knowledge of midwifery, birth and child rearing.

African women are rarely recorded as active in shaping the societal and geological conditions of colonial South Africa, nor were they credited as instigators of insurgency, social regulation or resistance until much later into the Apartheid regime, when women gained prominent positions in the uprisings. Women, more so than men, were often ethnographically observed and photographed as closer to the earth, physically and metaphorically. Physically, they were often captured crouching or lying on the ground, lower down than the photographer's gaze. Alternatively, they were pictured naked outside of huts or among groups of white men (fully dressed in white slacks and shirt), available to the viewer in the same register of colonial violation that permeated the settler gaze (see Chapter 3, 'Apartheid Architectures'). In colonial records, women represent the tribalisation of African land, mapped as small disconnected tribal communities housed in clusters of huts, practising what was perceived as traditional politics, kinship networks, rituals, morality and religion, seemingly immune to the violent geosocial transformations in African life. These gendered and fantastical representations of colonial Africa justified interventions in public health, education and religion that targeted women as the site of social reproduction in spreading the 'civilising' mission of British colonialism (Hunt 1999).

In the limited depictions of African women in the colonial archive, as Diana Jeater (1993) argues, the paucity in historical records relating to African women has resulted in stereotyped understandings of not simply female identity but the social construction and performativity of gendered and sexual relations in

South Africa. Gender and sexuality emerge as discourses of modernity through which the colonial subject was disciplined, rather than reflecting how people responded by challenging the mores of both settler and Indigenous societies and reinventing roles within the fissures of colonial occupation. That African women trespassed the norms of gender and sexuality that they encountered through colonial administration and Indigenous culture unveils a complex story in which settler townships and migrant labour provided different freedoms of spatial and social movement that women were able to take advantage of by virtue of the bifurcation of gendered labour and their invisibility to patriarchal settler concerns. The settler towns provided spaces of self-making and the expression of female sociality and sexuality that remade community spaces and their social fabric in new transient geographies that were largely ignored by colonial authorities. The women who invented new geosocial formations crossed the moral boundaries of Victorian domesticity and defied the customary role of African women. They did this under the radar of colonial authorities that conveniently ignored women because there was no prior identity to slot them into (Jeater 2020).

The shebeen queens were women who had moved to the settler and mining towns,⁴ where they set up small shops and sold illegally brewed beer.⁵ The relationship between labour and alcohol is summed up by Crush and Ambler (1992: 4), who state that 'drinking culture fostered compliance as well as resistance, passive acceptance as well as indignant action, hopelessness as well as a sense of empowerment'. Alcohol provided a lubricant that eased the movement of labour into the extractive industries and urban centres, and it provided a social space for political discussions and dissent, which would become increasingly important during the resistance to the Apartheid regime when shebeen taverns formed strategic meeting points. While alcohol sales and consumption were prohibited among Black South Africans and were reserved for the sole pleasure of white people, the shebeen queens

⁴ Shebeen queens is a term applied to the female traders and beer brewers who took up residence in the settler towns of Johannesburg and Bulawayo. We use the term here to refer to female beer brewers that emerged in these towns in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when the extractive industries were in full swing.

⁵ Alcohol sales and consumption were regulated through the Native Laws introduced in South Africa throughout the early 20th century. However, shebeen queens flourished in the informal brewing and selling of beer.

flourished in the recentring of community sociality in the informal brewing and selling of beer from their small shops.⁶

In addition to beer brewing, shebeen taverns provided many other services, including sex and companionship, food and lodgings, communications and messaging, and entertainment. The shebeen queens and their taverns were not known as spaces to procure sex, but they did provide intimacy and sexual pleasure. Shebeen queens were not wives nor female kin, but they did cook, clean and care for their clientele. As Jeater (2020, np) states: 'If they were wives, they were likely to be married to men from far away, with consequences for their identities in the own lineages and for their children's identity.' They had left their indigenous home to move to new towns, but they continued to pass on news from villages. The shebeen queens were infrastructural in the way that Simone (2004) posits 'people as infrastructure,' mobilising networks that aided navigation and improvisation in the city of Johannesburg. Similarly, shebeen queens provided a range of services that were illicit and illegal but essential to the organisation of extraction labour and the growth of colonial urban settlements.

[Shebeen queens] shaped new cities and new sets of social institutions to go with it. But in all of this they were represented as an absence, without roots, without morals, and without any right to exist. Women played a very significant role in creating African urban spaces, because of their continuity as residents. But they were denied space by African men, as by white administrators. They were the bedrock of communities, but they lost meaningful identities in the process. (Jeater 2020, np)

Shebeen queens appeared to thrive in the interstitial spaces of colonial administration and vernacular life, and in disavowing the dominant patriarchal and raced power relations, they were also constitutive of that power while alleviating some of its most brutal claims on identity. The splintering of intimate and geographical lives not only gave space to new forms of gender non-conformity but intimately tied questions of sexuality to Black liberation and freedom from oppression.

The shebeen queens cemented their claims to power by buying property and establishing themselves as legitimate business owners whose wealth was handed down through generations. Property ownership allowed them to claim permanent residency in often transient informal communities,

⁶ According to Jeater (2020) the beer would have had the consistency of porridge.

affording a position of authority and leadership within township communities. They acquired knowledge of local administration and built friendships and networks in the city that placed them at the centre of communities. They also accumulated wealth, which was highly unusual and remained a deliberate blind spot in the colonial property records. Wealth and property gave the shebeen queens degrees of autonomy in sustaining their livelihoods and homes, as well as in their influence over the intimate relations and recreational activities of mine and urban workers. That shebeens still exist today, and their owners and taverns are remembered (there was a 2024 reality TV series called *Shebeen Queens*), is testimony to their influence and cultural capital in the formation of South Africa's urban centres and resistance movements. The inventive spatialities opened by shebeens recalls Toni Morrison's observation: 'Because each had discovered years before that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them, they had set about creating something else to be' (Morrison [1973] 2004: 51).

During Apartheid, shebeen taverns served as important meeting and communication points in the uprisings because of the accumulated and sedimented local knowledges and networks they mobilised. One of the most celebrated historical shebeens was MaThoko's house in KwaThema in the 1980s and early 1990s – a time when homosexuality was illegal in South Africa – that provided a gathering place for the emerging LGBT movement. The postbox from her house is commemorated in the Apartheid Museum, Johannesburg as a node for letters sent from across the country in search of a refuge, community and the organising of political action in the Anti-Apartheid movement and LGBT struggles. For some, the violence of colonial forms of sexuality was inseparable from the wider liberation movement and explicitly linked homophobia to other forms of social injustice. MaThoko's house became the headquarters of the KwaThema branch of the Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand (GLOW), the first mass Black gay and lesbian organisation in South Africa (Marnell 2015).

The shebeen queens presented something of an anomaly to colonial logics and patriarchal rule that afforded these women invisibility and degrees of autonomy, but that position also meant that they rarely entered into colonial records. Colonial administration conveniently ignored them or turned away from them. Evidence of the fullness of their lives and everyday practices in knitting together a sense of community against the backdrop of racial subjection and the transience of migrant labour is found in the epistemologies of the townships and in the existing shebeen taverns and queens that tell stories repeated down the line of history (Jeater 2020). The shebeen queens bear a similarity to the women

of Harlem at the turn of the 20th century, whose lives Hartman (2019) engages with through critical fabulation *across* the archive. Black women appeared for the briefest of moments in official ledgers, and their entries usually reported their incarceration and deviancy. Hartman takes these few lines, evidence that these women had once existed, and develops an affective history that uses critical fabulation to allow for the complexity and richness of their lives to gain force as they navigate the decades of post-abolition and their own sense of self-understanding in the prejudicial socialities of urban America. Hartman's use of critical fabulation offers an intervention into the archive, bringing attention to the blindspots, silences and erasures of Black women in the violent white historicity of America. Hartman is also persuasive in working against the archive, not just to challenge the narrow violated subjectivity accorded *Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* but to question the historicity of methods in social and historical geographies of Black life by practising a mode of speculative narrative writing as a valued epistemology that exposes the power/knowledge matrices that constitute archival records. Peter Abrahams says of the shebeen in his novel *Mine Boy*, around which the narrative takes place: 'Within the shebeen there is a flattening of the stratification pyramid so that men and women interact under conditions of equality.' It is Leah, the shebeen owner that teaches Zuma (the protagonist), who has come from the rural areas, how to be in the city:

I will try to make you understand. In the city it is like this: all the time you are fighting. Fighting. Fighting! When you are asleep and when you are awake ... So, to live here you must be hard. Hard as a stone ... where you come from it isn't so. (Abrahams 1985: 50)

While she schools him on how to toughen himself up in the context of the bitter and brutal relations of the proto-Apartheid Malay camp (the novel was written two years before the institutionalisation of white supremacy in Apartheid), she also brings him into the family of the shebeen and its warmth, with a bed, food and company.

The shebeen queens have similarly been written into fiction as both the spatial locus and narrative heart of an affective history, illuminating the cognitive dissonances of why they were ignored by authorities that could not comprehend their anomalous position and highlighting how they made the spatialisation of mine labour possible by providing comfort and solace to migrant workers in the context of extractive labour.

In keeping with Hartman's critical intervention, the shebeen queens, by virtue of their historical contradictions, claim whole realms of freedom in the

worlds of Black women living on the edges of settler towns. Shebeens perform other forms of social reproduction that vitalise the intimacies, sexualities and identities of Black life. Their capacities to reproduce other kin relationships and social realities both support colonial extractionist economies – making life possible and liveable – and defy it by repositioning the spatial and temporal coordinates of informal communities, economies and pleasures that have come to characterise urban Africa. While missing from the history of colonial extraction, the shebeen queens were an affective node in continuing life by other means during colonial occupation. In the context of the portal, the shebeen was both a rip in the colonial fabric of regulation and a mode of maintenance in communal life that staved off the swirl of psychosis by channelling it into the small explosions of (alcohol-fuelled) excess that characterised these establishments.

The shebeen queens mobilised a form of mimesis to the colonial authorities by accumulating wealth and status – claiming forms of gender power – and by dodging laws that restricted property ownership, particularly by Black men. Through their mimesis they reveal the gendered composition of diamond extraction. Women were repeatedly excluded from the geological and economic formation of the diamond mines, and yet through diverse forms of social reproduction, sociality and practices of commerce and care, Black women in the late 19th century made the extraction of diamonds possible; they birthed and nurtured generations of labourers and they serviced their needs. By the mid-20th century gender is recalibrated to make white women the primary consumer (but not the buyer) of diamonds and especially the diamond engagement ring. White women re-enter the story to stabilise heteronormative patriarchal capitalism in the postwar years (by returning to traditional wife roles from wartime labour roles) and to allow De Beers to capitalise on its stock of historical diamonds and cement its power in determining the monetary value of the stone. In 1914, the main mine at Kimberley closed – it now forms part of a heritage site commemorating the history of diamond mining. The diamonds on display dazzle in the light, yet refuse to recognise and reflect back on the socialites, forms of abjection and disavowal through which the value of the stone materialised as the rarest and most precious of gems.

A Diamond Is Forever

As chair of De Beers, Rhodes made inroads into the diamond trade internationally that was dominated by syndicates of mainly Jewish families across Europe and the Middle East. By the turn of the 20th century, Rhodes had

established De Beers' command over the supply of natural diamonds to the chain of linked trades in the polishing, cutting, valuing and selling of diamonds across the world. After Rhodes's death in 1903, Ernest Oppenheimer took the reins at De Beers and sought to strengthen its monopolistic hold. One of his key tasks was to meticulously account for all the diamonds in existence and to map where they came from and where in the world they were held. In the early 1980s, the American investigative journalist Edward Jay Epstein (1982: 85) wrote an exposé on the invention of the diamond trade. He wrote of Oppenheimer:

Whereas Rhodes had seen the diamond monopoly as a means of extending the British Empire, Oppenheimer saw it as an end in itself. He wanted to create a truly international business that owed its allegiance to no single nation. His strategy, he explained to his brother Louis in a letter, was to make De Beers 'the absolute controlling factor in the diamond world.' By 'absolute' he meant control of each and every link in the diamond chain that led from the mines to the distribution network for diamonds.

Through the early decades of the 20th century, De Beers built up a depository of detailed marketing data that helped to determine the consumer base and give the company a steer on when they should release their historical stocks of raw uncut diamonds mined mainly at Kimberley. During this period, all the De Beers stock, which comprised nearly all the world's uncut diamonds, was held at Charterhouse Street in London. Each year the company scheduled around ten 'sights', when they invited renowned jewellers, polishers and cutters to view and select the raw diamonds they wanted. As Epstein (1982) reports, this was no straightforward marketplace; there were rules to the game that companies had to comply with or risk being black-listed by De Beers and banned from future 'sights' – cutting off their supply of diamonds. Invited companies were not given free rein to peruse and select stones; instead, they were issued a box containing raw uncut diamonds from the De Beers stock that were of varying size, colour and value. They were given space and the tools needed to explore their box and either take everything in it or nothing at all. They could not exchange or trade the contents with other companies at the 'sight'; in fact, they were deterred from conversing at all during their visit. The contents of the boxes were tailored to each viewer. De Beers selected stones according to research on the state of the market, the number and quality of diamonds in circulation, and the customer base. The 'sights' continue to run today out of De Beers' headquarters in Gaborone, Botswana, instead of London, and research reports are made available about every

aspect of the diamond trade, carefully analysed to determine what out of the De Beers historical stock goes into circulation.⁷ The 'sights' allowed De Beers to maintain their position as the world's premier supplier of uncut diamonds.

Two world wars and an economic depression threatened to wipe out the value of the diamond. Customers curbed their spending and the risks of missing, stolen and black-market diamonds entering circulation would have disrupted De Beers' marketing insights and loosened its monopolistic grip. In reasserting control over the diamond trade, the company commissioned NW Ayer and Son to design an advertising campaign that would promote the diamond as the rarest of gems and an object of heterosexual desire to consolidate the terms of heteropatriarchy. The famous 'A diamond is forever' campaign was a formative geosocial constellation because it tied together economic stability, gender and love in the years of renewal following the Second World War with the extraction industries that materially made white supremacy.

The tagline 'A diamond is forever' reached into deep time to play on the cosmic wonder of the diamond as one of the seven oldest minerals to have forged the earth (see Figure 2.4). The campaign also played on the diamond as the hardest known crystal that would always dance with light and never crack or wear. These geological 'origin' values were translated into an economic value of diamonds as timeless; the diamond would retain its financial value over time (akin to the gold standard). According to Epstein (1982), this is how De Beers invented and sustained their control over the diamond market. The NW Ayer and Son campaign for the engagement ring, with the gem mounted on its bridge, proved the perfect vessel for establishing the material properties of the diamond as the symbol of romantic love, which according to Howard (2006) led to the current wedding industry that is worth around \$80 billion. Much like the refracted prism of light that cuts through the clearest diamond, the De Beers advertising campaign created its own spectrum that projected in full technicolour glory the heteronormativity of postwar domesticity and its link to security and commercial growth in the US. Marriage became the spatial unit of American consumerism, opening the door to what Murphy (2017) theorised as the 'economisation of life,' meaning the encroachment of neoliberal capitalism into the domestic sphere transforming private life into an endless market, starting with white goods and moving into

⁷ See the De Beers website, which contains information about the 'sights' and claims that 90 per cent of the world's natural diamonds are sold through the sight auctions, www.debeersgroup.com/our-business/diamond-trading (accessed 20 October 2025).

1/4 carat (25 points) \$90 to \$200
 1/2 carat (50 points) \$225 to \$450
 1 carat (100 points) \$375 to \$1150
 2 carats (200 points) \$1365 to \$5200

In April, 1956, jewelers throughout the country were asked for the prices of their top-grade engagement diamonds (commented) to the weights indicated. The result is a range of prices, varying according to the qualities offered. Exceptionally fine stones are higher priced. Add Federal tax. Exact weights shown are infrequent.

N. W. AYERS & SON

Message of Love—painted for the De Beers Collection by Pierre Ino

The miracle of love

A girl's joy, flowering like a rose, is radiant and full in the lovely miracle of love awakening. And for her a star, blazing bright as her dreams, will recall this moment always. Her engagement diamond, fair spark of eternity, reflects the light of her happiness in changeless splendor, and treasures its tender message of love until the end of time.

Remember, color, cutting and clarity, as well as carat weight, contribute to a diamond's beauty and value. A trusted jeweler is your best adviser. Extended payments can usually be arranged.

a diamond is forever

De Beers Consolidated Mines, Ltd.

Figure 2.4

'Miracle of Love' from the De Beers and N W Ayers and Son advertising campaign 'diamonds are forever', 1960. Source: Bridgeman Images.

the psyche. The diamond was the economic dowry that secured the state bond of love and prosperity – an affective architecture that wrapped around marriage and articulated a narrative of ownership of time and gendered property through racialised economies of the home.

The normative arrangements linking gender and the economy that were represented in the diamond engagement ring ‘reflected the changing gender roles of the late 1930s through to the early 1950s in which white and middle-class women were expected to stay at home and men were expected to provide for their family’ (Pequignot 2019: 6). At the end of war, the gendered division of labour was reanimated through the nuclear family and the sense of living in an uncertain world.

This image of the contented nuclear family living in suburbia remains imprinted in cultural memory. Despite all the social changes of the last few decades of the Cold War, this vision of the nuclear family endured because it offered a sense of contentment and security in a seemingly insecure world. (Pequignot 2019: 4)

When Gladys Hannaford Babson rolled into town selling diamonds, she was also selling what Elizabeth Povinelli (2006) argues is the ‘fantasy of liberalism’ that requires a performative subject and set of relations.

On the one hand, the fantasy of Liberalism is tightly associated with the fantasy of the performative subject ... On the other hand the fantasy of Liberalism is tightly dependent on the ability of these discourses and their material institutions to transform the world in an image of its own normative horizon. (Povinelli 2006: 14–15)

As discussed above and displayed in Figure 2.2, De Beers and trade representative bodies produced guidebooks on how to sell diamonds (to women throughout the postwar decades). One way to sell diamonds was to introduce a version of four Cs – carat, colour, clarity and cut – used to measure the quality and value of the stone that customers could understand with ease. The four Cs were promoted as a measure of quality, but also as a measure of the male buyer’s wealth, status, judgement and taste. The four Cs continue to provide an indicator of socio-economic status and carry the symbolic capital of being able to read wealth into the diamond without stating the price. Much like Taylor Swift’s engagement ring that instantly drew estimations on the carats of the stone, rather than speculation on the settler aesthetics of the ‘old mine cut’ stone and its white supremacy origin stories, the diamond functions as an instant index of symbolic value that retools the histories of racial geology as ‘vintage’ Figure 2.5 shows a sales interaction drawn as a cartoon that exaggerates gendered consumption, but it is worth remembering that this image is from a guidebook. It offers instruction on how to push the fantasy of liberalism through the discourses of gender and patriarchy at the point of sale.



The 4 C's in Diamond Selling

**... Carat Weight, Cut,
Color, Clarity**

Figure 2.5

'The 4 Cs in Diamond Selling... Carat Eight, Cut, Color, Clarity'. Source: unknown.

The cartoon depiction of a couple buying diamonds, and the woman looking particularly happy with the chosen rock and chosen mate, is perhaps apt at signifying that this scenario is a fantasy. The performativity of the diamond fantasy has been explored in popular culture as a prison that induces a form of psychosis, producing fractures that mirror those experienced by Schreiner growing up in the psychosexual constraints of settler society. The domestic realm aspires to the kind of seamless identity that cannot ever be ascertained because mimesis and alterity reproduce each other. The performative subject that dances in the light of the diamond can never be fulfilled. As Berlant (2011) argues, a form of 'cruel optimism' takes hold as the neoliberal subject is continually tripped up by trying to grasp at the very things they desire. What the diamond ring promises is a life of comfort and safety, which cannot be satisfied as that would undermine the capitalist mode of consumption upon which the dream depends. A world

of chaos and uncertainty is always threatening to crash in and rupture the fantasy in reproducing itself. The diamond ring itself operates as a form of social reproduction through its capacity to both reflect racial violence and forget it.

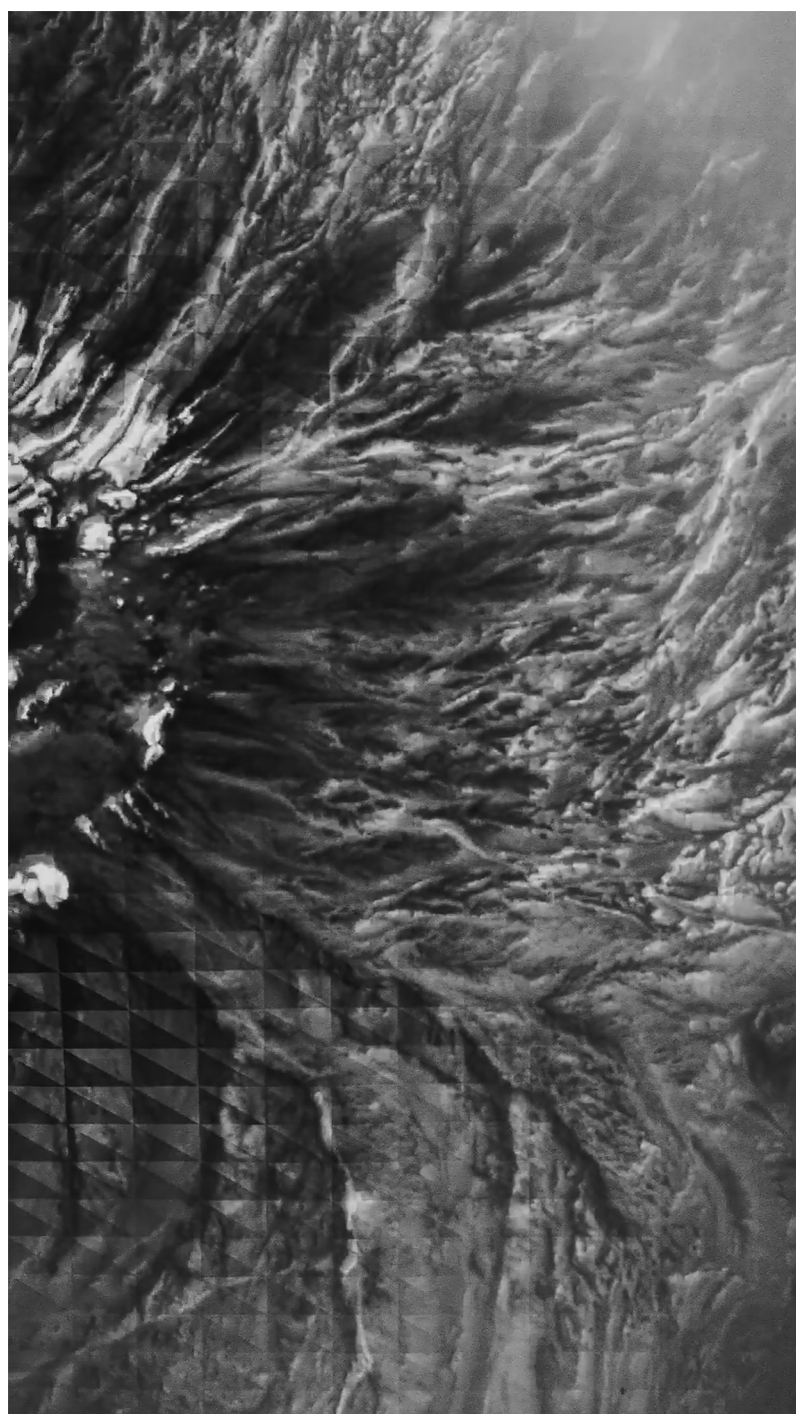
Conclusion

In the De Beers advertisement ‘a diamond is forever’ the woman holds a rose to her heart and points a finger towards a diamond hovering just above her shoulder (Figure 2.4). Clearly, she wants the diamond mounted on a metal band to be slipped onto her ring finger to fulfil the ‘miracle of love,’ a wish that belongs to her as a woman. Men are depicted buying diamonds but never yearning for the love they promise. However, while the hovering diamond sparkles in her direction, it is just out of her reach, and she has only a rose for comfort. The De Beers early advertising often featured a lone woman looking longingly at the diamond, yearning to experience what it represents. The floating diamond looks like a star ‘blazing bright as her dreams, will recall this moment always’ as the copy states, which conjures the cosmic journey of her love travelling with that of the stone. The campaign at NW Ayer and Son was led by three female advertising executives and a team of saleswomen, such as Hannaford, who travelled the US to sell the fantasy. By featuring lone women, the early advertising also represented an alternative vision. The advertising started the ‘diamond is forever’ story with the depiction of an unwed woman – no ring – who is unable to participate in the life promised, the political economy of the postwar US. Women were depicted as incomplete subjects without the diamond and all its promises. While the diamond conjured love, it also configured the fantasy of white neoliberal America that sublimated (and subjugated) love between Black people to elevate the cultural ideal of homogeneity and heteronormativity that fuelled the expansion of late racial capitalism.

The material changes of state that transformed earth into rare minerals articulated emotional and psychological grammars that shimmer through life on the diamond fields, the mines, the edges of settler towns and into the white suburbs of US cities. This chapter has approached this shimmering effect as part of the portal that connects mimesis and alterity across spatial and temporal zones, repeating over space and time the emotional and psychological affects that spiral out from the colonial-extractive economies of the diamond mines. The chapter has explored how the aspirations

of colonial domesticity and rationality split open when mimicry fails, when the geographical imaginaries of settler life and diamond prospecting are fractured by the psychosis of colonialism. As Schreiner (1992, 2015) observed, how can anyone maintain peace and comfort in the settler colony when the violence of Black subjection is all around?

Forms of mimesis were practised by men in the labour mine camps and among the shebeen queens in mirroring and mimicking forms of ritualised white heteronormativity in the context of brutalised conditions and in the marginal spaces of the bore-portal of racial capitalism. It is through these forms of mimesis that alterity emerges as a reinvention of terms and spaces in which forms of mutualism are made to mitigate violence. That Black men married each other, and Black women bought property, is ignored and turned away from by colonial administrators and supervisors, as though looking into the diamond Ponzi scheme of white heteronormativity will fracture its structure as a guiding narrative through which life is recognised as valuable or not. The diamond ring consolidates these histories of mimesis and alterity in fabulating an ideal way of heteronormative white life that is always under threat from the chaos of the outside world, and yet the ideal cannot be satisfied without *undermining* the very political economy it depends on. Through all these portals, the diamond articulates emotional and psychological grammars that in their swirl constitute the continuance and repetition of colonial-extractive relations through which race, gender and sexuality are (re)organised and practised.



3

Apartheid Architectures

In Figure 3.1, three huts protrude like icebergs out of the ground. Interconnected by circular thatched roofs, they seem to organically merge together under the sun. Their generous overhangs create thick, dark shadows to resist the heat and make them appear as if they are floating on cool air.

In front, five white men are captured: four of them standing up, one in profile staring into the space to the left, the others, hands on hips staring straight at the camera. The last one, Rhodes, is slouched on a chair; we cannot really see his face but the annotative capacities of the archive – *his* archive – confirm it to be him. The veil of shadow drapes over the scene. It must have been challenging for the photographer to balance this darkness against the



Figure 3.1

Cecil J. Rhodes and his entourage posing before traditional African huts, no title in original, c. 1902. Source: The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. T45.

brilliance of the high sun. The result is a slightly overexposed image or, rather, the white shirts worn by the five white men are overexposed to make them appear as bleached ciphers in the landscape.

The contrast between the shadowy huts and the overexposed shirts performs the fantasy of white bodies transforming Africa from a 'dark continent' into an enlightened, legible and therefore governable space. In the photograph, the huts stand for what Toni Morrison calls a 'blank darkness ... [of] conveniently bound and violently silenced black bodies' (1992: 38) onto which the literal whiteness of colonial intent can inscribe itself. The only person in the photograph who does not appear relaxed (a settler genre-pose of capacious leisure that naturalises claims to stolen lands), who does not pose to repose, is the man in the background staring straight at the camera. Within the architectural constellation of African huts, he too is rendered as background, a form of 'repressed darkness' (Morrison 1992: 38). Yet, his overalls stand out just like the brick chimney on the right-hand side of the image, protruding from behind the thatched, circular roofs; both reveal the artificiality of staging African huts as a blank darkness against which Western modernity stands strident.

This chapter considers the hut as a portal of built form as it cooks together African architectures as an origin pivot and a modernist Ponzi tether, inscribed into the colonial transformation of environments through narratives of European urbanisation and development. Rather than providing the gravitational suck into the vacuous space-time of the underground or the psychotic swirl of unearthed materials, the hut presents the portal as a built form in which environmental knowledges, gendered traditions of making and the sensibilities around collective forms of habitation collapse into stylised vernaculars and place-based technologies. The portal in its built form reveals how the objectification and fetishisation of the 'primitive hut' in architectural discourse develops a syntax that places the hut alongside 'native' and 'Black' as a degree zero on which colonial narratives can be built and mobilised. At the 19th International Architecture Exhibition at the Venice Biennale (2025) curated by Carlo Ratti, this narrative composition that places the hut within European tales of progress framed the opening of the main exhibit at the Arsenale with the following pitch:

Architecture has always been a response to a hostile climate. From the earliest 'primitive hut', human design has been led by the need for shelter and survival, driven by

optimism: our creations have always strived to bridge the gap between a harsh environment and the safe, livable spaces we require. (Ratti 2025)

In an interview with the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Ratti goes on to cite the French Jesuit priest and self-acclaimed architectural historian-cum-philosopher Abbé Marc-Antoine Laugier as an inspiration for his framing of the origins of architecture and reiterates the importance of this trajectory today: 'So somehow, it's going back to the very origin of architecture, with the primitive hut in the forest, protecting ourselves from a climate that's against us...' (Ratti 2025). With reference to current climate change events, Ratti insists that the weather really is 'against us', from which follows that architecture is more needed than ever to provide solutions with tech at its full disposal. While Ratti relocates the hut within a European narrative of architectural origins, his teleology extends the long tradition of harking back to 'primitivist' forms. African huts have historically circulated widely at World Fairs, zoological gardens and exhibitions that often included 'human zoos' to authenticate European narratives of 'progress'.¹

If we think of architecture as an insertion into time – with a disciplining effect on environments and mediating the future through the stylistic creation of nostalgic pasts – then its material cartographising becomes manifest. This chapter traces the rendering of the hut in Rhodes's imperial complex as part of a much wider fetishisation of the hut in Western architectural discourse and settler narratives of improvement and accomplishment. From Laugier's 18th-century Enlightenment ideas to the World Fairs of the 19th and 20th centuries, and from the practical unit of taxation in colonial southern Africa to its role in reimagining the modern city and building the skyscraper, the hut is understood as an archetype that colonial reason builds against to escape the 'dark night' (Mbembe 2010) of vernacular practices and earth relations.

¹ The last human zoo was in Belgium in 1958, while the central draw of the Afrika Museum in Berg en Dal, the Netherlands, until its closure in 2023 was its extensive outdoor collection of 'reconstituted African villages,' huts that visitors had picnics around. The human zoo theatrics meets technofetishism was arguably revived in Ratti's curation, with the addition of live Bhutanese artisans carving alongside a robot arm (as part of the Bjarke Ingels Group installation 'Ancient Future: Bridging Bhutan's Tradition and Innovation'). The message about the 'bridge' of technology was unclear, it seemed to suggest something about co-existence with AI rather than replacement by it.

Elevated and celebrated as *the* original architectural form, as foundational to the art of building, contemporary architectural theorisation and historicisation mobilise the 'primitive hut' as a spatio-temporal expander that enables time to be configured within the selective editing of settler colonial architectural timelines. The chapter shows how in colonial southern Africa, the hut gained importance for colonial secretaries as it emerged as a measurable unit of taxation, providing a means of forcing local populations into waged labour (i.e. racial capitalism) and driving them to work in the diamond and gold mines. Furthermore, the diamond proved crucial in the building industry, as an abrasive that enabled engineers to build larger structures, giving birth to the skyscraper at the apex of Western urban modernity. As a portal in built form, the hut therefore provides a fractured perspectivism into the material landscapes that connect the gold and diamond mines across southern Africa with the emergence of Western urban modernity, forging material and affective links between the hut, the diamond and the skyscraper.

In the logics of escape that fuel Western narratives of progress through modernisation, the hut represents both the nostalgic past and a temporal index point in human development 'out of Africa' – an endless repeating ground for colonial teleology to build on in its claims for innovation and development (moral, epistemic, material and technological) – as well as the fiscal unit that mobilised the material basis of high-rise construction (through the diamond drill bit). By exposing the logics of subjugation and exploitation that underpin the architectural hut-fetish – *fetish* understood here in Marxist terms as the assigning of the value to the object as co-constitutive of social relations and hierarchies (see Pietz 1985) – and its foundational role in shaping contemporary urban design practice, the chapter draws attention to alternative readings of the hut. These readings are from the perspective of those who, like the man photographed in the background, are made to inhabit, perform and build huts within the colonial complex (and against the fetishisation of their position within these social relations), as well as from the perspective of those who built and live with these vernacular architectural forms. Following critics like Mbembe (2017: 38–77), who reframes modernity through an African lens to argue its underpinnings in the consecration of African and Blackness forged through the production of the racial subject of capitalism, the chapter draws attention to other ways of engaging with huts. The aim is to open a portal through which planetary architectural practice can take alternative temporalities and material realities as a starting point for more just narratives of world-building, thus putting forward a theory of the 'planetary vernacular'

(see Yusoff et al. 2025) that constitutes the complexities and temporal conditionalities of architecture.

Build again. In *House of Bondage* (1967), Ernest Cole centres the hut as a fissure in the Apartheid state. In the series *Banishment*, he visits people who were banished by the Apartheid regime for allegedly participating in activities that organised against the state. Condemned to live on some of the most arid lands in the country, which were all but impossible to cultivate, ‘the banished’ were placed in huts without basic provisions of water, electricity or sanitation. Banishment was a form of expulsion from the modern state to derelict environments. It was a blunt political tool with which to remove people from the metropolitan regions and their narratives of political life to live ‘out of sight’ in rural areas – cut out of society, cut out of white time and its progressive claims. By banishing people to live out the rest of their lives in huts similar to the ones on display in the Rhodes’s image (Figure 3.1) more than 60 years earlier, the hut becomes a vehicle through which people are condemned to reperform the spectre of a ‘dark’ past mobilised by the aridity of the environment as a medium of violence. Here, settler colonialism proceeds through the elimination of the environment as the proto-ground in the elimination of the native (after Wolfe 2006). Wolfe (2006: 387) says, ‘Land is life—or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be—indeed, often are—contests for life.’

Yet, on his trip to visit the banished land, Cole encountered another kind of darkness that emerged from within the shadows of coloniality’s continued presencing. Arriving late, after sunset, he recounts his first impressions: ‘At first all I could see was the faint glow of hot coals, the remains of an open cook-fire. Then a few black huts took shape, a dozen of them squatting forlornly in a cluster against the long, low skyline.’ (Cole 1967: 189; see also Figure 3.2). Contrary to Rhodes’s bleached huts baking under the blinding sun, Cole encountered a cluster of black huts, their outline contoured against the backdrop of the low-hanging night sky – black on black, illuminated by the celestial geology of the sky. Through his photographs, Cole draws the viewer into the black darkness of the huts as a signifier of the negative space that emerges within the ‘blank darkness’ of colonialism (see the Introduction, where we reference Fred’s escape, in *The Man Who Lived Underground*, through the manhole cover from the ‘terrible darkness of the day’ (Wright 2021: 145) and the ‘death-like quality’ (Wright 2021: 107) of the world above ground). Cole inverts the hut from a ‘blank darkness’ on which the white fantasy of progress



Figure 3.2

Seen through the doorway of one man's hut is his never-changing view of neighbouring huts and sunbaked veldt, South Africa, 1960s. Source: Ernest Cole / Magnum Photos.

is projected to a spatio-temporal rupture from which to inhabit the colonial present and practise a relation to the earth and belonging to the land.

This is not a nostalgic return to the land but rather a refusal of being submitted to the binary reductivism of either 'inside' or 'outside' the state, 'inside' or 'outside' modernity, 'included' in the future or 'condemned' to the past (see Canham 2023). Cole's hut photographs do not document the lived experience of the Banished or 'give voice' to people unseen and unheard in the tradition of reportage photography. Rather, Cole's inversion develops a form of *architectural night vision*, an ability to operate within and through the shadows and negative spaces of insurgent resistance, refusal and insistence on reconfiguring socio-environmental relations. It is through learning to see in the dark that the viewer gains the vision to face the long shadow of colonialism, to turn towards another colonial day in order to turn away from its continuous resurfacing.

The importance of seeing through shadows is similarly noted by Hugo Canham who, in *Riotous Deathscapes*, draws attention to the practice of cupping one's eyes with the hands in order to see in bright sunlight – a practice known in isiMpondo culture as *ukwakumkanya*: 'Creating a shadow in order to illuminate... creating light by blocking the sun's glare ... to block

out distractions and draw into sharp relief' (Canham 2023: 6). Cole's hut photographs can be argued to practise *ukwakumkanya* insofar that they open a space that enables an unbounded density of life to emerge against the grid of colonial visions and calibrations. Much like Fanon's fugitive – who veers in and out of the car headlights that give chase across fields and down alleys – escapes the colonial gaze and its compulsion to capture by rendering Black bodies visible, legible, knowable, Cole's images draw attention to the body and life that instead slips out of sight, off the grid, by way of eluding and unbordering subjectivity into opacity (see Glissant [1990] 1997). As Canham insists, abandonment in rurality has other modalities than those dreamt of in the necropolitical heart of the urban. The density of Cole's vision is the dimensionality of life lived askew and adjacent to apartheid geographies and architectures and their determinations of life.

Taking inspiration from Cole's photography, Fanon's fugitive and Canham's psychic riot, this chapter centres the hut as the portal in built form through which to turn against the space-time of coloniality and its racial shadowing. The chapter examines how the hut is constructed as the developmental antithesis of light (i.e. Enlightenment) that becomes transmuted into height in the architectural paradigm of modernity's achievement. We dismantle the imaginary that indexes the African hut at the start of a teleological development narrative towards the skyscraper as the pinnacle of modernity. In this way, we follow Mbembe (2017) through his *Critique of Black Reason*, where he argues that the tendency to consider modernity as synonymous with Western culture and civilisation fails to recognise Africa's role as a site of extraction, pillage and exploitation that enabled colonisers to 'modernise,' placing instead *Africa* as the true image of modernity. This reversal of narratives tilts the centre of modernity towards Africa, drawing attention to the role that Africa plays in the planetary 'community whose blood stains the entire surface of modernity' (2017: 29). Echoing the sentiments of Aimé Césaire who, in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* ([1963] 2013: 29), writes of my 'thumb-print and my heel-mark on the backs of skyscrapers and my dirt in the glitter of jewels!,' Mbembe's view of modernity *from Africa as Africa*, much like Cole's architectural night vision, provides a portalled perspectivism that shifts the cartographies of both reason and geography from the colonial confines of imposed space and times. Concentrating on a distinct architecture in Western reasoning that came to codify and consolidate colonial imaginations of Africa, we seek to interrogate the performance and possibilities of these portalled trajectories that govern the material forms, geographical ties and speculative genres of making worlds.

From Hut ...

The African hut has long fascinated architects and been the subject of much theorisation by architectural historians along an axis of primitivism to modernity (see Frith 2004; Giovannini 2000; Rykwert 2000). Lauded for its structural simplicity and for assuming an imagined symbiosis of natural relations between humans, building materials and the environment, the hut appears as a reference point throughout architectural writing and practice as *the* origin point of an invented historical path. The vernacular in the colonial storyline was scripted as primitive rather than in its more recent guise as ecologically attentive (or recuperable within the trajectory of racial capitalism as an architectural form that 'treads' lightly on and with the earth). With its use of site-based earth construction, geographically specific materials arranged through ancestral building techniques, the hut is constructed as a prehistoric form in Western architectural discourse – a fundamental building reference form for architects to return to. The hut is rendered as seductive because of its supposed simplicity. It seemingly resists the decadent indulgence of ornamentation associated with baroque, Gothic and neoclassical styles that mark European settlements often in worship of a higher power, such as God, the state and/or capitalism. Instead, in its perceived simplistic form, the hut reveals the 'pure' essence of building associated with a more natural state of living and relating to the environment (Rykwert 2000; Sabatino 2008). One step up from the (Plato's) cave – reason propels the Western subject out of the shadows and into the light – the hut functions as the intermediary stop on the way to supremacy and Enlightenment.

Against the backdrop of the Enlightenment and the *longue durée* of modernity over the 19th century, the hut came into vogue among architectural practitioners and writers because it offered redemption from the purported alienating effects of industrialisation and the mechanisation of building techniques. Critics argued that the resulting artificiality in buildings separated humans from their natural environments rather than bringing them closer together. The hut provided the rational, modern subject with the promise of a return to more embodied architectural forms, founded on 'natural' materials and building principles, located 'beyond history, in human nature itself' (Rykwert 2000: 65). The hut-as-origin-story stimulated the desire for nostalgia, for harking back to an idyllic pastoral past, a prehistoric, pre-ideological, 'purer' time, unsullied by the present moment's technological transformations. As the British architect Owen Jones wrote in *The Grammar of Ornament* ([1856] 1972: 16): 'If we would return to a more healthy condition, we must

even be as little children or as savages; we must get rid of the acquired and artificial and return to and develop natural instincts.' The hut-as-origin-story offered a simple architectural prototype as an essential archetype of what it means to be human, existing in some pristine state outside the artifice of modernity occupied by 'children' and 'savages' (an interchangeable racial diminishment). A 'return' to human nature was promised and possible. While the hut was whimsically re-enacted as a return to childhood, it also revealed the patriarchal and racial paternalism of such a framing, which placed colonial subjects who inhabited hut-based community structures (in Africa, Asia and Australasia) firmly in need of architectural instruction. The racial spatial deficit in turn legitimised the devaluation of environmentally attentive technologies of indigenous architectural practices and their relation to geographically attentive environmental knowledges.

Throughout architectural history – from the revolutionary developments of art, philosophy and politics in 18th-century Europe to the contemporary global interest in sustainable and accessible housing designs – the hut has received special attention in architectural journals (see Rykwert 2000; Sabatino 2008) and books (see Odgers et al. 2007; Samson 2015) and as a reference point in World Fairs and architectural exhibitions (see Cheng et al. 2020; Mallgrave 1985; Schmal and Budde 2010). The fetishisation of the primitive hut and its associative affordance of simpler, more sustainable and healthier ways of living not only serves to legitimise architectural design practice but, as Peter Dickens (1981: 23) suggests in his polemic essay 'The Hut and the Machine,'

the *archetypal rustic hut* and the *machine* are the two main modes by which contemporary building-form not only legitimates itself, but also suppresses uncomfortable social themes (particularly the fundamental capital-labour antagonism) and emphasises themes conducive to social harmony and mass loyalty.

By narrating the hut-as-origin-story as a solution to global socio-environmental challenges, architectural practice purges itself of the dark underbelly of (racial) exploitation, extraction and subjugation that historically nourished it. This chapter draws attention to historical legacies of suppressed racial and classed logics that define contemporary urban thought and architectural design, which far from departing from the narrative of primitivism, reinforces it. From the photographs of 1902 referenced above through to the inclusion of the African hut in the Central African Rhodes Centenary Exhibition in 1953, the hut is mobilised as a vehicle not only to stage Western teleology of material

progress against the backdrop of 'primitive' cultures but to legitimate land grabs and the displacement of Indigenous communities. At key moments in architectural writing, the hut emerges as the focal point through which to imagine architecture (and humanity more widely) through the silenced violence that permitted this form of dreaming.

The oft-cited and much revered reference point for the hut-as-origin story in architectural history is, as referenced in the interview with Carlo Ratti, Marc-Antoine Laugier's *An Essay on Architecture* (1755). The essay presents a rather flippant and non-systematic treatise on architecture that traces the origins of Western building form and practice back to the temple-like hut. His aim was to 'save architecture from eccentric opinions' (1755: 2), develop a grounded critique of classic architecture and its 'chaotic mess of clumsy debris' – like the overt use of columns in the Renaissance and the elaborate ornamentation and theatricality of space in the baroque style – and instead draw attention to the essential principles or fundamentals of building practice. Considering architecture as a form of 'shelter' that provides the human body with 'a place to rest' (1755: 11) and through its construction 'protects but does not bury [the body]' (1755: 11–12), he sets out to wonder how a 'man in his primitive state' (1755: 11) would make use of the natural environment to seek protection from the unmerciful elements: under 'the scorching heat of the sun' the 'primitive' heads to the 'cooling shade' of the forest; he heads for a cave when exposed to 'torrential rain pours'; and when submerged in 'darkness and foul air', 'the uncomfortable damp that penetrates everywhere' (1755: 11) in the cave, he heads out to find 'some fallen branches' from which to build himself a hut:

he chooses four of the strongest, raises them upright and arranges them in a square; across their top he lays four other branches; on these he hoists from two sides yet another row of branches which, inclining towards each other, meet at their highest point. He then covers this kind of roof with leaves so closely packed that neither sun nor rain can penetrate ... by imitating the natural process, art was born ... True perfection ... The pieces of wood set up right have given us the idea of the column, the pieces placed horizontally on top of them the idea of the entablature, the inclining pieces forming the roof the idea of the pediment. This is what all masters of art have recognized ... Let us never lose sight of our little rustic hut. (1755: 13)

Stripping away the ornamental 'chaos' and decorative 'faults' of different competing architectural styles, Laugier claims to arrive at three principal elements – the column, entablature and pediment – that together form the essential parts of architectural composition. From ancient Greece to the *Ancien Régime*, he claims, 'all masters of art have recognised' the configuration

of these three elements in transforming space into architectural space – the architecture-as-primitive-hut nexus was born to merely provide shelter, but it is transformed into the justification for architecture.

Extending this work and setting out to formulate a theory of typological origins of architecture, rather than models, the French architectural theorist and armchair archaeologist Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère De Quincy (1788) turned towards ‘primitive times’ to identify hunters, shepherds and farmers as ‘first societies’ that were associated with three distinct forms of architecture: caves, tents and huts. Hunters, Quatremère narrated, who travelled long distances to hunt prey, had little time to settle and build abodes and therefore relied on caves and caverns for periods at a time. The nomadic life of shepherds, who moved with their herd from plain to mountain, was too mobile to rely on the stationary cave and instead relied on the lightness of tents to carry around and set up on the move. Agrarians were more stable in their cultivation of lands, relying to higher degrees on the durability of constructed huts.

While Quatremère’s typological trilogy served to locate the origins of classic architecture in different styles and techniques, it also lay the foundations for creating racial typologies of architecture from a European vantage point: caves were associated with Egyptians and Indians, tents with Chinese and huts with Greeks. For Quatremère, the hut-as-origin-story therefore came to foreshadow ‘a trope of Europeans being considered the people capable of progress and historical advancement, while other groups were condemned to historical stagnation’ (Cheng et al. 2020: 137). Like Laugier before him, Quatremère’s theory of architecture was Eurocentric and highly classicist, recognising only the ‘roots’ of primitive architecture in European cultures while relegating other forms of hut building to lesser forms or bygone environmental knowledges. To both writers, the foundational principles they sought and claimed to find in the primitive hut therefore revealed that ‘truth was singular rather than plural’ (Giovannini 2000: 115): one form designed and inhabited by one race, which subsequently gave shape to racialised theorisations of architecture as a determinist form of building.

It is little surprise therefore that the inherent prejudice in both Laugier’s and Quatremère’s work provided the foundations for 19th and 20th-century racialisation of architecture and ‘racial attributionism’ that gained prominence with the rise of eugenics, slavery, race theory and colonial-anthropological exploration (see Frith 2004; Giovannini 2000; Sabatino 2008). While it is beyond the aim and scope of this chapter to provide a detailed history of architectural origins and the location of the hut within liberal humanist discourse (see Odgers et al. 2007; Samson 2015), the fetishisation of the hut in architectural theorisation paved the way for the racialisation of architecture

at subsequent architectural fairs (see Cheng et al. 2020). With the acceleration of modernity in the 19th century, the hut is showcased at World Fairs as the antithesis of Western architectural and engineering skill, and a testimony to how far Western societies have progressed 'Out of the Hut' (a discourse recapitulated by Ratti in 2025). The fascination with the hut was not the kind that Laugier and Quatremère showed towards the Greek temple; rather, the hut, built by tribal peoples out of mud or woven natural materials, represented the collective past of human societies, and in this way, huts were museum pieces in that they offered a glimpse of how humans once lived (and how racialised communities who were not considered fully human under racial schemas continued to live, thereby marking them as part of the past, not the future). In the chronology of architectural history, the racial narrative of development could be materially evidenced and held in place by the referent of the hut (which in turn justified the social degradation of its inhabitants).

At the World Fairs and Exhibitions of the 19th century, indigenous huts were transplanted from their specific environmental context, often in a singular form, detached from their communal setting in multiples (or community) and placed alongside towering structures. At the Great Exhibition in London in 1851, Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace drew applause and came to define a new era in architectural design with its transparent, glass-louvred façade demonstrating not only the technological advances of industrialised society but Britain's position as a global financial and technological power. Yet, at the same exhibition, a smaller pavilion showcased the 'indian or Caribbean hut' transplanted from Trinidad. To the lay visitor the simple structure, life-sized figures and domestic utensils 'served no doubt as an exotic and perhaps amusing reminder of the reach of Her Britannic Majesty's colonial arms' (Mallgrave 1985: 60). Against the shimmering glass structure, the architectural-cultural juxtaposition spotlighted the apex of British industrial design and culture (enlarging the vitrine of colonial botany to the size of a 'palace'). To the German architect Gottfried Semper, who visited the exhibition, this 'Carrib Cottage' was not simply a necessary object through which to stage Western modernity but rather, in the tradition of Laugier, a powerful demonstration of the foundational principles of architecture. To Semper, the 'primitive hut' was not only an ethnographic fact of pre-industrial dwelling but offered a lesson in foundational building and design principles 'giving rise to monumental form' (Mallgrave 1985: 62). In other words, the 'primitive hut' offered a prototype for an architectural theory of monumentality that, like the pyramids, grand bazaars and temples of great civilisations – and unlike the elaborate glass structure of the Crystal Palace – would offer

architectural blueprints freed from ornamentation and the mechanistic fetish of the time. Here, the hut-as-origin-story facilitated a 'purer' form of monument building: stacking columns and entablatures in layers to engender a movement from hut to high-rise. Architectural forms have long been a means of temporal expression as much as they are spatial statements about materiality and technology. Shooting up (skyscraper) rather than hunkering down (hut) was demonstrative of will and evidence of mastery, according to the logics of empire(s) and its transformation of environmental conditions.

At the World Exposition in Paris 1889, also known as *L'Exposition Universelle*, the display-exhibit entitled *L'Habitation humaine*, curated by Charles Garnier and Auguste Ammann, explicitly staged the teleology of hut-to-high-rise as architectural typologies from across the world were arranged in chronological order along *L'Esplanade des Invalides*. As Irene Cheng comments, the exhibit displayed:

examples of houses from around the world ... arrayed in a linear arrangement, from 'primitive' to advanced, all under the shadow of the Eiffel Tower ... The message was clear: some cultures were signed to prehistory, or no history at all, whereas others were hurtling into an engineered future of iron and glass. (Cheng et al. 2020: 147)

While the arrangement of different architectural typologies in a straight line created a linear direction of progress, of moving forward in time on the ruler stick of history from the origins of the primitive mud-hut to the futuristic towers of steel-lattice work, the hut plays a particular role in situating the engineered, machinic future of modernity. Placing yourself along the hut-to-high-rise timeline gave a crude indication of what time you belong to: the time of the future (up) or the timelessness of stuck in the earth (down).

The future horizon is contoured not despite the horrific violence necessary for its production but because of its visible display of horrors. The juxtaposition of the high-rise and the hut successfully delivers the modern promise of the future, not *despite* the violence of colonialism and racial capitalism necessary for its production, but *because* of this violence. At the World Fair, violence was sublimated into an idyllic reproduction of daily life in the African hut-cum-village, where visitors could walk about and observe 'indigenous people going about "normal" daily activities.' As Lynn Palermo explains:

[In] addition to watching Muslims kneel in prayer at the foot of the minaret of the Algerian pavilion, visitors could enter a Kabyle home to observe women weaving at their looms; watch a family of New Caledonian Canaques prepare dinner over an open fire; or poke their head into the tent of a nomadic desert family. (Palermo 2003: 291)

The sublimation of violence in the idyllic scene of the array of primitive huts unsurprisingly resurfaced in the interaction between visitors and ‘visitors’. In newspapers at the time, reports suggest that many visitors wrongly assumed that the colonial subjects who were made to perform ‘everyday’ rituals and routines did not speak French. But they did and overheard the foul commentary under which they were made to perform – cruel dehumanising remarks, denigrating comments and objectifying exclamations. Take the visiting master jeweller Samba Lawbé from Senegal, who is quoted saying:

We are very humiliated to be exhibited this way, in huts like savages; these straw and mud huts do not give an idea of Senegal. In Senegal ... we have large buildings, railroad stations, railroads; we light them with electricity. (Palermo 2003: 291)

Not only is the primitive hut transplanted from its ‘original’ setting to create a primitive backdrop against which the teleology of Western progress and white superiority can be displayed, but the colonised is condemned to perform an anachronistic, premodern idea of village life that awaits ‘modernisation’. Like the primitive purity of the hut is out of time, out of place, the staging of ‘modernity’ as if emanating from Western culture denies the fact that modernity was experimented and emerged from ‘the rest of the world’ – for Sylvia Wynter it is born in 1492 in the Caribbean, for Mbembe (2017) in Africa – and thus is presented as a false promise that it too could be exported to the colonies: the African hut is pierced by the scintillating aspirations of a super-modern futurity embodied in the lure of the high-rise structures and the continuing discourse of the shiny (as with the diamond).

Whether in the World Fair, the ethnographic museum, travel diaries or in museum dioramas, juxtaposition successfully produces a Western dialectic of progress, not despite the relegation of ‘Africa’ to *one* primitive culture but because ‘guests’ are encouraged to indulge in the violent *jouissance* of fetishising an African singularity as reduced to the monolingualism of one. Here, Brand’s writing on the ‘colonial event’ is helpful as she argues that its aesthetic (i.e. representation, sensation, configuration) can never be separated from the ‘colonial event’ itself; instead, she proposes that the aesthetic *is* the colonial event: ‘the pleasures, tastes, manners include the juxtaposition. What is pleasing, what is in beautiful form, *is* the violence’ (2020: 24; emphasis added). If the violence necessary to create the juxtaposition is the primordial pleasure that drives the fetishisation of Africa – from the Black body to the hut – the notion of Western modernity in the form of the high-rise, the skyscraper, must be understood as not separated from the hut but driven through

it. The seductive powers of the skyscraper form, offering vantage points from which viewing platforms, restaurants and sky-bars curate the city, also function as a backdrop against which to indulge in the pleasures of consumption from above. Settler temporalities, crystallised in the violent juxtaposition with the curated cityscape, are architectural manifestations – assembled as architecture in global genres as a built shorthand for investment and financial flows. The narrativisation of human evolution drew a line from the body flung across the ground to the erect, walking body carrying itself off ground, and it required the analogous architectural tale from hut to high-rise to showcase the advance from primitive building forms to the technological sublime.

While the World Fairs of the 19th century provided the crudest examples in which the origin stories of modern architecture were crafted through the fetishisation of the hut – and its antecedent isolation from the communal village and removal from land as it is transplanted into another time-space geography, outside of time and space, outside of any geography – such narratives carried on, unabated, in the 20th and 21st centuries. The theft and consolidation of land displacements enacted the continued removal of hut-based communities and flung the hut further into rural lands considered marginal to the projects of racial capitalism (unless required for tourist consumption).

Continuing the tradition of displaying African huts in architectural exhibitions as stages on which to mobilise colonial futurity, the 1953 Rhodes Centenary Exhibition recreated an ‘African Village’ along the lines of the colonial imaginative unit of the hut for the occasion of the world tour of Her Majesty the Queen Mother and in celebration of Rhodes’s durational capacity as an emblem of the white supremacy of infrastructures of extraction. The 17 June headline of the Southern Rhodesia newspaper *The Chronicle* reads:

‘Showing how the native lives,’ ‘African Village is unique,’ ‘If you travelled from the Cape to the Belgian Congo and visited all African villages in between, you would not find one like the African village at the Rhodes Centenary Exhibition. For there is not one like it in existence,’ said Dr. E. H. Ashton, Bulawayo Municipality’s Director of Native Administration, addressing the National Affairs Association yesterday ... (*The Chronicle*, 17 June 1953)

There certainly was not one like it in all of Africa: because it was a fantastical village, a psychic archetype of the colonial imagination, an invention of museological desire that sought to archive a people and a place as mirror and mine. In the fantastical village of the colonial imagination that existed nowhere on the African continent apart from in the minds of the colonisers,

the Matabele were approached and a leading organisation of Africans in Bulawayo was given what was thought to be the privilege of building huts. The African replied that they thought the time was more one of mourning, than celebration and refused. This, he said, gave an interesting sight of African opinion, often unknown and mostly unheeded in the Colony. But the Matabele huts were built. Then local Bechuana women volunteered to build huts in their style, and so the setting was complete. (*The Chronicle*, 17 June 1953)

The gendered question of who gets to be an architect and who gets to be primitive aside, the article touches, however briefly, on an inflection of pain. In a rare concession to the feeling of the other who is simply there to mirror the colonial subjects' idea of themselves, the press reflects how the Matabele 'thought the time was more one of mourning'. Rhodes led the invasion of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) paramilitaries into Matabeleland in 1893–1894, which caused the death and displacement of thousands of Ndebele (Matabele) from their land. The infrastructure of Maxim machine guns and Martini–Henry rifles set out on Iron Mine Hill, tore through time to deliver a sizeable chunk of territory to the crown and set up Bulawayo as a settler's town. The show went on, with or without 'those without whom the earth would not be earth' (Césaire [1963] 1995: 110–114).

Subsequently, the author of the newspaper cutting notes how the Matabele were asked to build beehive huts for the Swazi contingent that was to come. The Matabele, who used this type of hut in the time of Lobengula, built the huts, but when the Swazis arrived they did not like the huts as they were not quite in the old style. The Swazis rebuilt four of the five. One of the Matabele efforts remains as 'an interesting contrast'. Alongside the huts, in the tradition of the human zoo that 'animated' the architectural formations in Europe's fairs, many African craftsmen and women, along with musicians and cooks were drafted to the site to generate an 'authentic' experience of African life in the desire-lens of the diorama.

He, said Dr. Ashton, is the last of a long line of iron smelters and his method is the same as that carried on since the Iron Age came to this part of the world – a period of up to 5,000 years perhaps. His forge was interesting too, as it was in the shape of a woman. This showed that smelting was not a commercial venture, but was intimately connected with the idea of fruitfulness of the earth and nature. Music and dancing done there were to propitiate the spirits and were necessary for successful smelting. (*The Chronicle*, 17 June 1953)

The Iron Age cultures complemented the primitive hut in cementing African peoples into the past and in commune with the earth. The Africa

imagined, in its continental appearance by the indifferent colonial powers of Britain, France, Belgian and Portuguese 'territories', was of raw materials, raw metals and minerals, including gold, iron, coal, diamonds, copper and 'exotic' but temperamental culture (aka people). The native of purity and rawness echoed through the architectures of buildings, extraction, education and expulsion from land. The primitive must be worked, so the narrative went, to achieve value. As the colonial script narrated the chorus line of natural resources (from extraction projects) on display at the exhibition, newspapers delightedly reported on the exhibition of 'native' huts as 'Showing how the native lives' (headline for *The Chronicle*, 17 June 1953). Both natural resources and the primitive hut had shared origins in the architectures of the colonial imagination that conditioned the context and culture for extraction.

Those that make the earth what it is, whose labour and wretchedness toil in the mud and mine, are required by the colonial imagination to remain in and of the earth, alongside the gold and the diamonds and the performance of 'native' cultures. The female architects, whose voices, work and craft have been erased from the narrativisation of architectural history, form part of the capillary network on which the planetary portal Ponzi scheme (see Figures 0.3 and 0.4) relies to produce its chains of value. As portals into a presumed primitive past, the huts showcased a future pointing away, but one that narrowed the perspectivism of who that future represented. They, the wretched of the earth, as Fanon tenderly calls them, needed to be there for the colonialist as objectified and solidified in an imagined past, and thus in a foreclosed futurity. The spatiality of the classification of race – as native, primitive, extinct – is both a distance from the colonial present and a dehumanisation of subjectivity. The repetition of alienation is made to travel across 'raw matter' to imagine both subjects and earth as a one-way axis of transformation (i.e. the earth is not imagined as transforming the colonial subject only being subjected to *his* will; the same is true of Indigenous cultures). The anticolonial will is the reversal of this subjugation – the recognition of geography and geology as intimate, shared and powerfully located in the geographies of subjectivity.

... to High-Rise

In the previous section we considered how architectural history mobilises the hut to enable Western futures of progress to take flight, all the while foreclosing futures of 'the wretched' and instead confining them to remain in the earth – first as discarded from the urban dream and second as a repository of

sustainability practices to save the urban dream from its own excesses. The material conditions of this double move – rising above and driving into the ground – suggest that the hut becomes entangled in a vertical narrativisation of racial hierarchies. In this narrativisation, the emergence of Western modernity, that is, the erection of the modern skyscraper, not only relies on the teleology of Western progress – from hut to high-rise – but also the material transformation of huts to labour (through the fiscal policies of the hut tax) and diamonds, which were used in the construction industry to create solid foundations for high-rise buildings to stand erect.

In the 19th century, the hut was mobilised as a taxable unit as it forced men into the labour economy from trade-based or agricultural forms of subsistence (see also Chapter 4, ‘Red Lines, White Spots’). The hut tax was introduced in 1849 as a spatial method of African taxation rooted in the British official and colonial system. The Shepstone-devised form of taxation, originally 7s 14 levied on each hut inhabited by the ‘native’ inhabitants of Natal Colony, was levied on African men above the age of 21 years, later increasing to 10 shillings. The tax was levied per hut rather than per person on reserves (see Bundy 1979; Ndlovu 2017; Walsh 1971). Initially designed to generate revenue for the colonial administration, according to the Volksraad Resolution adopted in 1895, the Hut Tax was revised to coerce Africans into the mines. Thatshisiwe Ndlovu argues that the ‘use of taxation as a means to pressure Africans into the labour system would remain a crucial element of taxation over the next century’ (2017: 7).

Organised through the levying of a tax in a money-based economy, the colonial authorities sought to secure the hut as a tool of management (through taxation) and imagination (through fetishisation). The hut became a pivot point to mobilise a eugenic world-picture, with the hut as ground zero of architectural accomplishment and a fiscal spatial unit that would facilitate the mobilisation of the population into unfree labour contracts and subjugated misery in the mines. As a designated means of introducing taxation on stolen land, the hut tax was fiercely resisted until the British took control of the Orange Free State and extended the taxation regime from the Cape Colony in efforts to secure a labour force for the neighbouring Kimberley mines. The taxation laws were accompanied by adjacent methods of moving Africans into ‘reserves’ (between 1889 and 1902, 60 refugee camps were set up as an intended consequence of the Anglo-Boer War, and 100,000 Africans were moved into these areas). The rationale of the hut tax was that Indigenous populations should pay for their own (racist) administration and infrastructural development, as Britain declined to do so.

The hut tax was also a means to socially and sexually regulate Indigenous populations in settler heteronormativity through the taxing of each hut and thus promote fiscal monogamy ('a tax on polygamists' quoted in Ndlovu 2017: 8). As the mine and the closed compound (see Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine') became the model for the extraction of diamonds and gold, the hut became an archetypal architecture of forms of bodily, gendered and sexualised extraction from existing social forms and geographical modes of inhabitation through the policing of sexuality and space. The hut propelled the transfer of people into units of labour and towards the suck of the mines to realise capital or death (given the thousands of Africans that died in these camps due to forced labour for up to 14 hours a day, exhaustion, accidents, inadequate food supplies and shelter, socially reproduced violent socialities and dehumanisation).

Once released from their earthly embrace, diamonds soon found their way into the hut-to-high-rise nexus, forging the temporal and psychic connections in ever more durable ways. Having invented the diamond drill known as the perforator in 1862, the Swiss engineer J. R. Leschot championed a newfound confidence in the construction industry. The efficacy and ease by which Leschot's diamond perforator could bore through bedrock enabled engineers to build foundations on challenging grounds and create foundations that could sustain taller and heavier buildings. By perforating bedrock and reaching through muddy soils to solid strata, the diamond drill enabled architects and engineers to reach higher into the skies. With reference to the rise of tall buildings in San Francisco following the Californian Gold Rush, Brechin (1999) invites us to understand skyscrapers as 'inverted mines' insofar that they are funded by the wealth accumulated from mining and built with the engineering knowledge and technologies used in the mines. By drawing attention to the role of the diamond, it becomes pertinent to add that the skyscraper is impossible – structurally, financially, socially and aesthetically – without the diamond. As a literal inversion of the material minescape, the skyscraper is built on racial hierarchies formed around the taxation of the hut to leverage labour to mine the mines, to unearth the diamonds used in their construction. From hut to diamond to high-rise, the vertical city and the wealth system and ascended imaginaries that it supported were under-ridden by exploitative regimes of racialised labour, land theft and mining.

The mobilisation of architecture in the material inversion of vertical worlds echoes the material processes of change that propelled Rhodes from the brickfields of Dalston to establish his mining empire in southern Africa. From bricks to slum housing and from huts to diamonds, the vertical inversion

of material states created a portal that unleashed a hellish power with which to determine *who* is above and below ground (see Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine') and under *what* conditions and vulnerabilities. Through the lens of the pivot (Figures 0.3 and 0.4), the narrative fetishisation of the hut as foundational for the emergence of the skyscraper draws attention to the shadow architectures of debt and depletion of land through taxation and exploitation; the skyscraper becomes impossible without the capillary network that ties environments and bodies into exploitative debt relations. The pivot offers, in line with Mbembe and Césaire's blood-shot reading of modernity, an understanding of the modern Western city as only ever emerging not *despite* violence but *because* of it.

An illustration draws attention to this shadow relation sublimated in material violence in a cross-section drawing of the Kimberley Mine with the Chrysler Building placed right in its midst (see Figure 3.3). The masculine desire to thrust the shaft of this tower through the hole of the diamond mine aside, the illustration draws attention to the comparative dimensionality – the literal mirror massing of an emblem of Western modernity in the shadow geology of the South African diamond mine – thereby establishing a geographical-material connection between centre and periphery, between above and below, and rendering colonial portals in terms of dimensionality. The horizontal compression of New York City and Kimberley into the same geography (which is on top of which?) and the vertical depression of the tower, back down underground where from its materials originate, is an oddly radical way of conceiving of the material connections between mining and modernity – reminiscent of Fred Daniels' act of returning diamonds to the muddy ground. In this drawing, the viewer is told that we cannot look at the modern tower without also seeing its shadow geology of the mine, and we might add without the hut whose incorporation in fiscal and architectural space enabled the organisation of labour to toil the mines, creating the tripartite nexus of hut-diamond-high-rise. From hut to high-rise, from diamond power to diamond tower.

'Darkness Is Not Empty'

The framing of architecture as a mediating technology between the human body and the elemental conditions of 'nature' reifies a purist notion of the hut as reflecting a material simplicity of a relation to the world from which the city and urban can rise as a product of Western modernity. The hut is enthralled

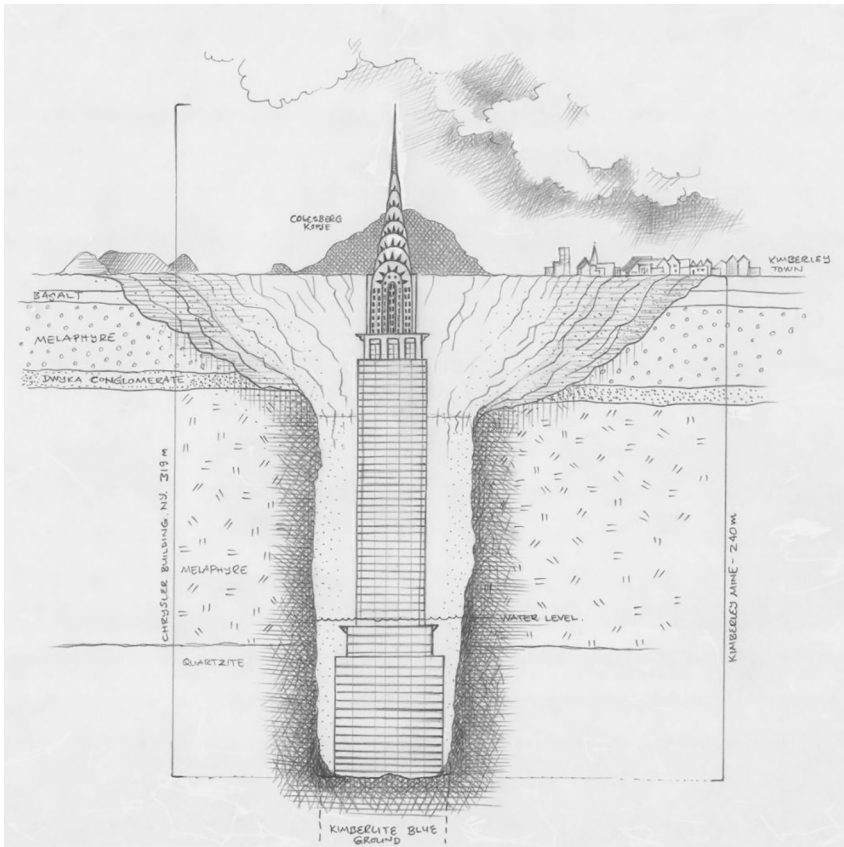


Figure 3.3

Line-drawn cross-section of the ‘Big Hole’ at Kimberley diamond mine superimposed with a scaled drawing of the New York landmark skyscraper the Chrysler Building.

Source: Blog, available from <https://grahamlesliemccallum.wordpress.com/2014/07/03/a-chronological-pictorial-of-the-kimberley-mine/> (accessed 9 March 2026).

in a vertical teleology of rising above the foundations and ground on which it stands erect, parroting a simplistic scripting of human evolution or, as Ratti proclaims in the text introducing the Architecture Biennale exhibition in Venice (2025): ‘From the first primitive huts to the submerged foundations of Venice, human design has evolved in dialogue with nature...’

The vertical teleology that marries architectural erection with the ‘progress’ of humanity is similarly evident in other exhibits. Take the exhibition entitled *From Primitive Hut to Skyscraper* (2010) at the German Architecture

Museum in Frankfurt am Main, where the linear chronology of architectural 'progress' stands in for a Western-centric narrativisation of global cultural progress: 'the history of architecture is also a history of mankind's [sic] cultural development, which began with the primitive hut around 400,000 BCE and stretched all the way down to our day and age, to the megastructures of the 21st century metropolis' (Schmal and Budde 2010: 3).

While the exhibition refrains from dwelling too much on the significance of the primitive hut – it only refers to indigenous Indian huts and villages in dense tropical forests – it recreates a hierarchy reminiscent of Banister Fletcher's *Tree of Architecture*: a Eurocentric/eugenic tree that places modern, machinic, skyscraping futurity at the apex of and as the direct inheritor of architectural styles of the past in hierarchical-linear fashion – prehistoric, Egyptian, Roman, Greek, medieval, Renaissance, baroque, industrial, modern, postmodern/American. Through the reductive logic of classification and the violent act of transplantation, models of each style recreate the dimensions to display their relative difference – that is, progression – in size and dimensions. From the tiny to the gargantuan, the tale of skyscraper modernity only works as a tale of progress if it can balance on the backs of primitive huts (and the material geographies and geologies that are containerised in that spatial unit). And it only works if the hut can be isolated as a single unit from which an imaginative inference to the singular tower can be made. The from-hut-to-high-rise narrative presents a singular teleology not only by juxtaposition but through the constellation of binary oppositions in a co-dependent relation, existing only through their co-existence.

This kind of co-dependence is exemplified throughout the rich literature on the history of the modern skyscraper. Take Adrienne Brown (2017), who in her prescient rewriting of the history of the North American skyscraper – *The Black Skyscraper* – draws attention to the spatial co-dependence between the construction sites where Black and migrant labourers worked and the racially segregated neighbourhoods where they lived. In the official histories of modernity that depict the exhilarating construction sites of architectural monstrosities gradually rising from holes in the ground, 'racial erasures' of the ethnic workforce are commonplace and often 'forget that members of these racial colonies, too, were present at the scene of building' (Brown 2020: 217). The construction of skyscrapers relied upon an exploitative regime of fungible labour: different ethnic groups were made to work under hazardous conditions or face the threat of replacement by 'gangs of out-of-work ironworkers [who] hung about on the streets around job sites' (Hayden 1977: 109). Rather than exalting the fantasy of progress, prosperity and upward social

mobility, the skyscraper, Hayden argues ‘consumes human lives, lays waste to human settlements and ultimately overpowers the urban economic activities which provided its original justification’ (1977: 108). Yet, in the shadows of these gleaming towers, Brown (2020) draws attention to the settlements that labourers constructed – often using scraps and leftover building materials from the construction sites on which they laboured – in the peripheries of the morphing metropolis, defining an emerging independence among labourers. The story of the skyscraper therefore not only is one of architectural amnesia and racial erasure but also one of liminality, of occupying the shadows that lie within and beyond celebrated relics of modernity as a starting point from which subjugated people can reimagine themselves beyond the segregated city.

The spatial configurations of settlements that mushroom in the shadows of gleaming towers have received attention in the context of the South African metropolis, through the rich literature on the vertical city par excellence, Johannesburg (see Cane 2021; Harrison and Zack 2012; Iheka 2021; Mbembe and Nuttall 2008; Zack and Lew 2022). Due to its historical role as the central market for trade in gold, the distribution of mine labour and the residual financial service industries, Johannesburg’s central districts attracted global financial institutions and multinational corporate businesses to locate headquarters in the city, creating the foundations that made Johannesburg the only African city to be listed as an ‘alpha city’ on the World City Index (Harrison and Zack 2012; Iheka 2021). The legacy of its gold-mining history can be read in the vertical cityscape as gleaming glass and steel towers rise from entirely hollowed ground, as if the modern metropolis floats quite literally on a vacuous subterrain that echoes with the haunting present absence of mine labourers. Perforated by thousands of boreholes at varying depths, the aerated crust on which the central business district hovers forms a co-dependent relation between above and below: an aesthetic mirroring of the shiny minerals unearthed below ground in the shimmering glass façades of towers above it; concealing and revealing that ‘there is no metropolis without a necropolis’ (Mbembe and Nuttall 2008: 21).

The vertical relation between skyscrapers (above) and the gold mines (below) formed an axis around which the racial segregation of Black Africans from white settlers was enforced horizontally as well as vertically. With the Native Urban Area Act (1923) that prevented Black Africans from purchasing or even renting land in white areas, the local authority of Johannesburg forcibly removed Black communities from inner-city neighbourhoods and displaced them into newly built townships on the periphery of the city, such

as Orlando and what later became Soweto lying south of the mine fields (Harrison and Zack 2012). During the 1930s, Johannesburg experienced an intense period of construction in high-rise buildings, as the clearing of large, 'informal' settlements in the central district readied the ground for more than 10,000 apartments to rise in the form of skyscrapers. To enforce segregation across the city, the Apartheid state required that all Black Africans show passes to enter the floating city, subjecting Black labourers to dehumanising inspections and controls. Yet, after the Soweto uprisings in 1976, the Apartheid state and the local municipality struggled to control the flux of people in and out of the city, and in 1986 it abolished this formal control (Harrison and Zack 2012). While the government tried to stall the influx by building new settlements like Orange Farm and Diepsloot on the outskirts of the city, it did little to prevent the re-emergence of informal settlements, shacks and shanties (Iheka 2021). From the racial stratification of populations across the vertical skyscraper-mine nexus during the first half of the 20th century, the second half of the century conveyed a renewed racial segregation of populations into informal settlements in the shadows of skyscrapers and modernity's false promises.

This is particularly evident in two recent photographic projects that draw attention to everyday life in post-apartheid Johannesburg. In Guy Tillim's photographic series, we encounter the vertical spaces of downtown Johannesburg, the dramatic vertical skyline that symbolises the city's status as a world city, a node in the global system of finance and capital. Yet, as Cajetan Iheka argues, by drawing attention to the 'decrepit multistorey buildings', Tillim directs the viewer's attention towards 'those left out of the hypercapitalism of this African space' (Iheka 2021: 190). Juxtaposed with photographs of Johannesburg's expansive skyline, Tillim presents a series of photographs of desolate, littered rooftops where laundry blowing on clothes lines and partial garden furniture reveal the traces of interstitial life. In some photographs, people move across the rooftops or take a rest – sitting for a smoke, standing by the parapet or lying stretched out in the winter sun, taking a nap, as if passed out. While Tillim's photographs portray the rooftops, and therefore the vertical city, as a sight and site of 'destitution' (2021: 194), they also draw attention to the everyday politics of waiting. In these images, the napping and lounging people aren't waiting in the 'imaginary waiting room of history' (Chakrabarty 2000: 7) for modernity to arrive but, rather, appear to 'kill time' as a way of 'passing their free time ... to mitigate boredom' (Iheka 2021: 193) while also embodying the maxim that racism *takes* time. Rather than reading these rooftop loungers as passively stuck in a position of idling, they might be read as ways of passing time as active resistance to the imposed

time of the modern metropolis (see Mujere 2020; Sutton et al. 2011). Where the 'loiter' becomes a spatial negotiation with racist time (see La Marr Jurelle Bruce 2019: 352).

The potential to reimagine and reinvent urban life in the interstices of Johannesburg's vertical cityscape is similarly evident in Tanya Zack and Mark Lewis's book-length photo-essay, in which they argue that it is 'in the very shadows of modernist skyscrapers' that there is evidence of how Johannesburg's 'decayed infrastructures' are being 'repurposed, reinvented, and reinhabited in new ways' (2022: 13). Focusing on a neoclassical tower block in Hillbrow, they draw attention to the diverse community that replaced the predominant white upper-class residents who after the Soweto uprisings fled to the white suburbs. They draw attention to the lives of 'black residents' who for cut prices were able to buy or rent their way into the building, 'in search of spaces of liberation from the authoritarian gaze of the government, its associated institutions, and a repressive and repressed society' (2022: 6). Through their photo-essay, the viewer is taken on a guided tour through the living-rooms, kitchens, bedrooms and makeshift studios and workshops, complicating the narrative of Johannesburg as a vertical, world city. In these images the daily struggle to make a home within the half-broken infrastructures of failed modernity is portrayed as what Simone (2022) terms 'unsettlement.' Yet, the images refrain from fetishising urban poverty and destitution and instead draw attention to what we, with Hartman (2019), might term the minor 'experiments in freedom' that residents engage with every day and every night in their daily struggle to carve out a meaningful living space within the vertical city. Or, as Cole argues with reference to the cover that shadows offer in photographs – hiding details and contours – 'darkness is not empty, it is information at rest' (2016: 153), meaning that it brims with information, with life that operates outside the logics of the visible: hiding, idling, loitering, making its own. Against the modernist vision of shimmering, shiny towers of progress, the shadow spaces of Johannesburg's skyline provide the *architectural night vision* from which to reimagine life in the post-colonial city. The architectural shadow spaces furthermore come to stand for an environmental urbanity that populations come to inhabit not, as Ratti suggests, against the weather but rather by reconfiguring the elemental conditions that failed architectural dreams invariably have produced.

Through both of the photographic experiments in re-presenting Black South Africans within the intense verticality of Johannesburg's urban environs, modernity – that is, the fantasy of high-rise futurity transplanted to South Africa – is repurposed through everyday acts of resettlement and

resistance that reclaim vertical space on people's own terms. Outside the (false) clock of modernity, these residents propose an alternate reality that foregrounds the collective networks of solidarity and support that make the alienating and exclusionary spaces of failed modernity habitable for those for whom it was not intended. Like Fred Daniels, who escapes down the manhole cover to configure another life in New York's negative space by reconfiguring infrastructures and objects of value, these purposive acts of resettlement are not defined by the racism that pervades the vertical city but instead become experiments in making Black life within the long shadows of colonialism. Similar to Cole's *architectural night vision* offered from the vantage point of the huts, the resistive forms of resettlement within modernity's shadowspaces present an inverted vision of 'modernity' (cf. Mbembe 2017) that operates as an insurgent resistance within and through the shadows and negative spaces insisting on reconfiguring socio-environmental relations (Green 2020b). There is no metropolis without insurgent insistence and no colonial portal without the reinscription of the shadow spaces it casts.

Conclusion

If we return to Cole's hut images and reconsider the role of the hut in the historical-material transformation of urban society, we might understand the hut not only as a cleavage or fissure in the Apartheid state but as a fracture in today's racial hierarchies of vertical cityscapes. Thinking with the hut not as a psychic archetypal form to be replicated, revered or relegated to the primitive but rather as a liminal, portalled perspectivism, this chapter seeks to reimagine how to inhabit the colonial present in ways that insist on a present relation to the earth and belonging to the land, rather than expulsion from it.

This discussion has exposed how the colonial portal has historically forced the hut along with its inhabitants into the ground, refusing the narrative of progress. By drawing attention to the liminal perspectivism offered by those that operate within and through the shadows of the high-rise and negative spaces of the hut, the chapter has extended Cole's *architectural night vision* to draw attention to moments of insurgent resistance that reconfigure socio-environmental relations on the terms of bodies for whom the city was not intentionally designed and planned. In Tillim's photographs we are invited to reconsider the skyline of Johannesburg not just a symbols of hypercapitalism and its transformation of the land, inside out, upside down and the mirroring of shiny minerals in the shimmering glass façades, but to

consider them as ruins or *inventive remains* reinhabited by interstitial life that insists on living on despite the failed promises of progress. These photos are portals that offer an inverted perspectivism where idling subjects, in the suspended spatio-temporality of failed modernity, are agents that actively refuse the imposed time of the modern metropolis (see Iheka 2021). Similarly, in Lewis's photographs, we are invited to bear witness to the appropriation of white space by Black residents – an insurgent reversal of modes and moods within the portal of the hut-cum-high-rise nexus that is emblematic of a horizontal reversal of Apartheid policies, creating a glimpse into ways that residents come to incrementally but assuredly repurpose vertical space on their own terms. These inversions of vision, meaning and ownership offer hopes for how the vertical city might be understood through the supportive networks of care that are practised by residents, redefining new ways to configure human–environment relations despite the materialities of on-going colonial extractions.



4

Red Lines, White Spots

The photograph in Figure 4.1, taken around 1900, shows a simple steel bridge running across the dried-up Klip River by Ladysmith. The tracks presumably headed from Johannesburg to the coast at Durban. In the background a bony horse drinks from the low-lying puddles and in the foreground, a young man sits in the shade of a bush. Golden crop. The pastoral tranquility of this withered shrubland scorched by the indomitable sun provides the serene landscape in which Western modernity stages its 'advance,' piercing the rural idyl with a rectilinear precision, a straightness of lattice-ironwork that flattens the horizon. The studied innocuousness of the scene is the point.

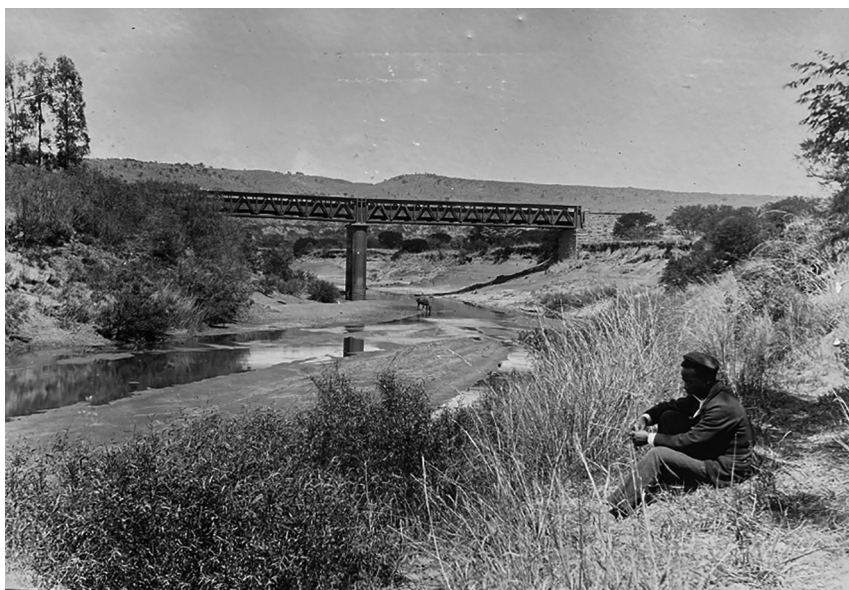


Figure 4.1

Bridge over Klip River, Ladysmith, c. 1900. Source: The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. 2201 Box 3.

Nothing to see here. The geology of racial violence is dissimulated from stolen land. Eschewing the ethnographic gaze, the photograph speaks to the tropes of settlement and thus the political imagination of a naturalised (and thus neutralised) transition of ownership. The brute force of British engineering feats punctures the photograph as it punctures the landscape, creating the presumption of a temporal disjuncture that catches the horse and the man in between two times, narrating one world replacing the other in the subdued violence of incorporation. The photograph already assumes the ease of settlement, and thus the young man is 'neutralised' in the frame and violence is made absent as the path of that process of settler assimilation. The 'destroy to replace' (Wolfe 2006: 388) tactic of settler colonialism as a racial and ecological project enacted through violence is replaced by an aesthetic of an already-settled frontier; a fictive dream of a rural idyll of timelessness to cover over the tense anxieties of settlement.

The photograph's temporal disjuncture speaks to the way colonial territories were pictured waiting for European 'modernity' to arrive. As Chakrabarty (2000: 7) observes with reference to Africa (alongside other British colonial territories), it was consigned to an 'imaginary waiting room of history'. The photograph prompts the viewer to question not what this man is waiting *for* but, rather, how the notion of waiting is bound up in the very composition of the body *in* the landscape, as part of a stage for Western modernity. How does one render visible the violence that subjects his body to sitting there, calm and composed? Is he, like the men in Guy Tillim's rooftop images of Johannesburg (see Chapter 3, 'Apartheid Architectures') as Cajetan Iheka suggests, condemned to simply 'kill time' as a way of 'passing their free time ... to mitigate boredom' (2021: 193)?

Is he passively stuck in a position of idling, or does he somehow transform the 'waiting room of history' into a portal of active resistance (see Mujere 2020; Sutton et al. 2011)? What is calmness here, in his waiting, if we remain cognisant of the potential restlessness of this 'riot inside', as Hartman (2019: 30) would call it? Aesthetically, he is confined in the white supremacist dream of continental domination, captured in the modern complex of colonial infrastructures – railway, telegraphs, agriculture and extraction – yet his ability or capacity to dream of other possible worlds beyond is not beyond the 'imaginary waiting room'. Following Frantz Fanon, agency can be conceived of both in relation to how he can 'remain in his place' while also, possibly, bursting with 'muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality', dreams of 'jumping, swimming ... leaping across a river' (2004: 15). In this chapter, we consider the industrial-colonial complex of railway, telegraph and agricultural infrastructure as a portal of extension that not only exposes the means of

imperial violence but which draws attention to the lives that inhabited landscapes before colonial bifurcations. By reading colonial cartographies within photography and maps as portals of extension, we recognise the need to give space to the lives that were lived within the colonial confines, not simply subdued, reduced, hemmed in, but full of dreams, full of desires that could not be reined in by the material remains of other imperial imaginaries.

Toni Morrison's notion of *re-remembering* or *rememory* is useful here in showing how memory is not only an internal recollection but also an external set of traumas that tangibly remain in place as a physical manifestation of what has happened and what returns in the present. Re-remembering is a way to think about the enduring legacies of the trauma of life and land theft that remain in the environment and continue to give material testimony in ways that the aforementioned photograph erases through its fictionalisation of the settler pastoral and its generated affect of ease. Morrison uses *rememory* to give physical presence to missing subjects and forgotten histories, so that the traumas that are hidden through anti-Blackness become real characters that have to be reckoned with and accounted for (as in the character Beloved, in the novel *Beloved*, 2007). Pointing to the importance of pictures in the relation and remains of place, Sethe in *Beloved* says:

'Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my *rememory*. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there. If a house burns down, it's gone, but the place – the picture of it – stays, and not just in my *rememory*, but out there, in the world. What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened.'

'Can other people see it?' asked Denver.

'Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes, yes. Someday you be walking down the road and you hear something or see something going on. So clear. And you think it's you thinking it up. A thought picture. But no. It's when you bump into a *rememory* that belongs to somebody else.' (Morrison [1987] 2007: 43; emphasis added)

Morrison's *rememory* is something akin to a practice of speculative non-fiction, a form of writing that maps counter-cartographic geographies of memory erased from the surface of collective place and its thought pictures. It is environmental. Unlearning the scene of erasure in this photograph of the young man and the railway tracks necessitates the clarification of the past about what went on in place, in its quieted brutal conjectures, and how to *rememory* through the unsettling of pictures of seamless transitions, which

cover the ripping terror of its portalled train dreams. Attentive to the epistemic disobedience of subjects caught within the colonial gaze, we attend to strategies for contesting incorporation that backgrounded racialised and environmental harms as normalised, neutralised and legitimised (as the ‘cost’ of settler progress).

In this chapter, we develop the portal as an extension of railway and communication infrastructures that spiral out from the extractive and urban portals to connect sites of extraction and exchange. As a portal of extension, railway and communication infrastructures exalted a dream of bifurcation and extraction on their advance across southern Africa at the end of the 19th century. *The Thin Red Line*, as the imagined line through Africa was named, was narrated as a planetary portal through which colonial rulers envisaged making a future for white supremacy in the imagined red web of cartographic control and settlement. Railway infrastructures were instilled to ‘open up the interior’, laying down lines that connected sites of extraction to ports of distribution, all awhile commodifying local populations as labour and annexing land and soil in the settler economies. Like no other form of capture, the oxidised red lines of British railway and telegram communication that reached from port cities (in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Durban, Lourengo Marques, Beira) across southern Africa (and north to Bulawayo, Mashonaland and Northern Rhodesia), through land transformed into farms and towns generated from mines northwards, relied both on existing pathways that Indigenous people used to cut through the landscape and newly invented places gathered round mineral sites. Colonisers used these routes to divide the continent as a governance of space, as race divided populations, to subdue the continent to the white fantasy of trade and travel (see Tilley 2011), for example, by easing the extraction of minerals and agrarian products while ensuring the movement of labour and military units. Africa, in this imaginary was conceived as a continental geological body to be bisected, with the life-blood of environments capillaried to the ports. It was not simply that railways were infrastructures that allowed things to move but they were the scaffold for dreams of conquest and settlement that enacted the environmental changes of state necessary for this to happen. Those scaffolds needed narration and thought-images to build the world of the colonial portal as an environment.

The colonial dream embodied in the plan for *The Thin Red Line* would not only extend a transcontinental railway from the Cape Colony to Cairo

in the north but also exalt the imperial fantasy of dominating the entire eastern side of the continent. The vision was designed to pull wealth out of the continent while drawing various forms of coerced, indentured and convict-lease labour into and around it. Yet, the challenge of financing its gradual extension and maintaining service once built meant that it only ever advanced in piecemeal fashion and never reached completion, ultimately remaining (just like Johannesburg's shimmering skyscrapers discussed in Chapter 3, 'Apartheid Architectures') as a figment of an imperial fantasy. Notwithstanding, its capillary network enabled colonial botany, agro-business and brick and tile making to refigure soil relations that readied the land for European settlement as train wagons carrying goats and sheep, fruit trees and vines implanted and configured a new environment. The sprawling railway and telegraph system also ensured that rail travel was suited for the comfort, health and wellbeing of northern European bodies (replete with ice-cooled refreshment stops, byproducts of the refrigerated dynamite depots required for the mines), sustaining the white pastoral fantasy that would make African soil 'as well-known, and as much a *home* to British subjects' as the British Isles themselves (newspaper cutting, *St James Gazette* 1899; emphasis added). In this way, the vision of *The Thin Red Line* can be understood as a planetary portal that reconfigured the African continent to form a white tunnel for European travel through and dominance over people and land.

Throughout the chapter, we show how *The Thin Red Line's* promise of transformation by bifurcation has endured despite never reaching completion, forming the basis for the contemporary mapping of digital infrastructures and data routes (see Chapter 5, 'Data Dreams'), as well as new Chinese redevelopment of partially completed lines. While the previous chapter conceived of the portal as a built form, within which and out of which Black subjects reinvent and reimagine lives within the lost and failed dreams of modernity, this chapter's conceptualisation of the portal as extension draws attention to the life forms that extend across and beyond the colonial infrastructural of bifurcation. *The Thin Red Line* made extraction, labour exploitation and farming possible in the colonial complex by pushing Black South Africans into landlessness and townships, while enabling the white settlers to 'depopulate' lands and settle in leafy suburbs, forming the perennial grounds and violent earth relations for planning the Apartheid state; it also provided a counterpressure. As we reveal how *The Thin Red Line* readied the continent to be covered in *White Spots* of value accumulation, we also draw attention to the experiments in living within

these confines, mapping the liminal and fraught counter-cartographic geographies of memory that have been erased from the surface of collective place making but which remain resistant within the frame as rememory (see Figure 4.1).

Thin Red Lines ...

The idea of a transcontinental railway line first emerged in 1874, pioneered by the newly instated Colonial Secretary, the Earl of Carnarvon. Appointed by the Tory prime minister and self-proclaimed imperialist Benjamin Disraeli, Carnarvon fashioned a 'Cape to Cairo' policy that would join British colonial lands in the north and south while wrestling large swathes of African soil from its European competitors, bringing the continent under British rule (Meredith 2007: 68). The imperial 'Scramble for Africa' picked up in the 1880s and British colonisers clung to the vision of a transcontinental railway as a lifeline that could join British colonies in the north and the south while staving off a French advance across northern Africa and preventing German and Belgian 'expansions' from either side of the continental coast. However, financing the transcontinental railway was challenging as investors sought assurances that the huge layouts for construction would be recovered from tariff incomes charged from transporting minerals and agricultural products along the routes (Katzenstellenbogen 1974: 63). In this way, railway construction and extension were not only speculative but deeply tied to other forms of speculation in mining and farming operations, relying on prospectors and surveyor reports sent to financiers in London that could provide probabilities for future wealth generation from the land, above (farms) and below (mines). And, of course, the availability of labour, dispossessed through dehumanising practices, to facilitate construction and make the mining and transport operations profitable (see Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine').

Despite not being financially viable and failing to garner serious support, *The Thin Red Line* emerged as a strategic ploy among British imperialists in southern Africa to mobilise support for continental dominance and its imaginary as the last place for Britain's empire to maintain its dream. As Katzenellenbogen (1974: 63) suggests, the dream of transcontinental travel proved 'useful in mesmerising the British public, Chartered shareholders in particular, to continue supporting the company'. Using his influence with local media outlets and newspapers, Rhodes promoted

The Thin Red Line wherever possible. In the conservative newspaper *St James Gazette*, which was known to report news in support of the British imperial activities, a story entitled 'the Thin Red Line of Railway' was published on 12 January 1899:

As his [Rhodes's] keen vision pierced the future and from Cape Colony looked northwards steadfastly from Bulawayo to the Nile ... with an administration established at Khartoum and definite means of transport improving each month, the Desert Railway will no doubt advance to meet a friend as swiftly as it covered the sands of the Soudan to crush a foe ... If the stars in their courses are not fighting for his plans of empire, the inevitable progress of events is making more possible, with every month, the mighty scheme by which the two extreme ties of the Dark Continent will be joined by an uninterrupted line of rail and telegraph. Out of Africa comes ever something new. From the days when the sacred land of Punt revealed to infant civilisations the first secrets of natural science and religion, to the century which heard with wonder the kingdom of Prester John in Abyssinia, and down to later years, when the miners shovel and pick axe are ringing among the ruins of ancient peoples whose very name has vanished, we have been ever ready to listen to the fairy-tales of travellers, and hear the prowess of mighty hunters in far-off fabulous recesses of that unknown land. It will soon be possible, no doubt, to take a first-class ticket from Cairo to the Cape, and, without getting off the train, to pass through all the length of Africa on soil that will be as well-known, and as much a home to British subjects, as the route from Land's End to John o' Groat's.

The vision of *The Thin Red Line* provided a planetary portal through which colonial rulers sought to 'pierce the future' of an African continent to form a red web, harnessing the horizon of domination. With pickaxes and big game guns they pilfered their way through the 'fabulous recesses of that unknown land', creating the fantasy of travelling through landscapes without ever having to set foot on land and thus establishing *The Thin Red Line* as a white tunnel through a dark imaginary of Africa. *The Thin Red Line* was both a portal and a colour line that aimed to crush indigenous opposition and resistance in its way to enable white colonial allies to gather and move with limited exposure and ease through the continent. As a masterplan of colonial compression and submission, a web of oxidised steel beams, copper cables and hissing steam trains was built in the 'ruins of ancient peoples whose very name has vanished' at the hands of the British rented army's brute military force of automated weapons and the soft powers of British 'diplomacy' and bureaucracy, causing the gradual but effective erasing of Indigenous names and languages and the expulsion of peoples

from their lands. Railway as warfare. Railway as erasure. Railway as a genealogy of 'uninterrupted line'.

Understanding the planetary portal of railway as warfare extending territorial claims and violence has clear links to the origin of the expression of the thin red line in British culture and common parlance. The expression originates from the Battle of Balaklava (1854) during the Crimean War where the British redcoats stood against the Russian cavalry forming, as reported in *The Times* on 25 October 1854, 'a thin red streak, tipped with a line of steel'. The expression refers to a linear formation of humans and non-human entities with the aim of protecting or defending a land or territory under attack, securing property from an external threat. A scarlet band of bodies, garments and oxidised metal lay down a spatial marker, a geographical boundary that interns land as a colonial property of empire – marking territory with the bloodshed of wars at its frontiers. The term was further sedimented in Rudyard Kipling's jingoistic poem 'Tommy' published in 1890 in the *St James's Gazette*, chastising civilian populations for their disregard for soldiers in the capital once their work in the empire was done. If *The Thin Red Lines* of soldiers, bayonets and barbed wire mark the bloody frontiers of the British Empire – the sinuous veins that fed the imperial war machine – railways and telegraph lines were key to extending the violent incorporation of land into its midst, epitomising the transcontinental dream of capturing Africa as a continental entity.

We might therefore consider *The Thin Red Line* as part of a wider plan to secure a future political stronghold in the eastern region of the continent. To this end, Rhodes sought to maintain a public image of a kind of diplomatic power broker who could govern strategic political relations in the region through a calm and steady hand modelled on the British mode of colonial diplomacy. As Rhodes wrote on 24 April 1898 in a letter to the Colonial Secretary of the British parliament, Joseph Chamberlain, pleading for support for the railway extension from the British government:

The question of the future government of the vast native populations within the British sphere must also be considered ... in the absence of rail or water transport, the establishment of a strong Administration is practically impossible. The last disturbances in Matabeleland furnish an excellent illustration. Had the railway been extended to Bulawayo in 1895, the rebellion of 1896 could not have taken place. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS Afr. 227, chapter 6, pages 6.3 and 6.4)

To Rhodes, the railway extensions and water infrastructures were the ultimate conduits for a 'strong Administration' to emerge and to ensure the 'future government of the vast native populations', narrated not through brute force but rather through the soft powers of engineering expertise and scientific marvel. In this way, the railway was invested with the imaginary of the 'technological sublime' (Nye 1994), built to be used but as importantly to be *seen* as spectacle. It rendered visible the gradual transformation of the landscape, performing the gradual submission of the continent to colonial will (see Figure 4.2). With minimal 'disturbances' – which Rhodes knew too well would scare off potential investors and make any further plans near impossible – the railway was envisioned and projected to potential investors as a civilised and civilising means of colonial control over land and Indigenous

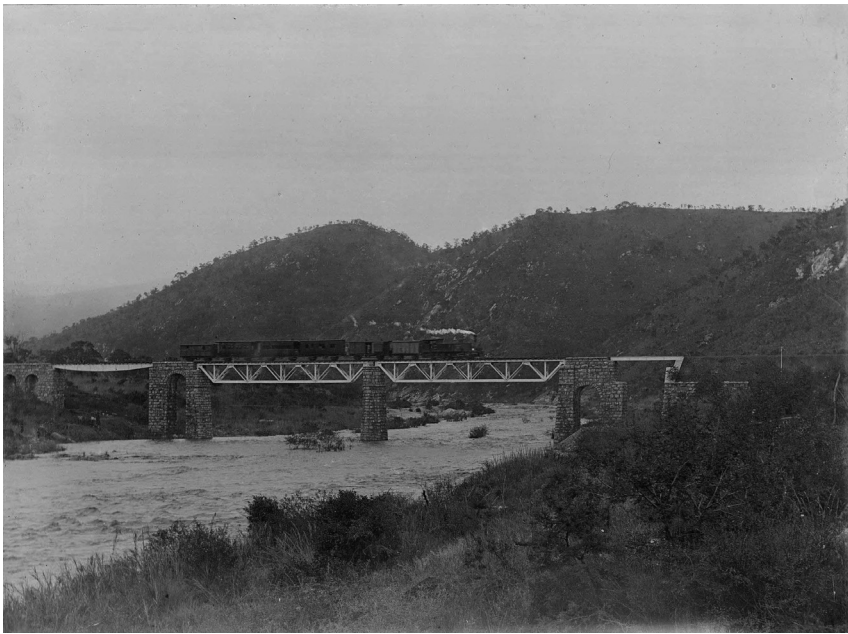


Figure 4.2

Steam train running on steel and brick bridge over a river and hilly landscape, no title or geographical specification in original, c. 1900. Source: Photograph album purchased by the Bodleian at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. t. 59, page 16.

people. As suggested by Lunn (1992: 239) with reference to Rhodes's master-plan, 'the railway became the advance-guard of (British) "civilization"' that enabled Rhodes to consolidate territories and join up the extractive and agricultural businesses across the region exactly because it appealed to a British self-image of a higher-moral-technical form of colonialism. In the publication *The Review of Reviews* in early 1892, under the title 'Not in favour of slavery—But of civilising by labour', Rhodes states that '[t]he work of civilising *these people* is slow' and criticises previous British efforts of missionaries or high commissioners in their attempts to 'civilise the whole world in one year' by overturning Indigenous people's faith and support of British governance systems, resulting in growing resistance and 'wars all around the frontier'. The work of 'civilising' people was ostensibly a long-term battle, played with patience.

Rhodes suggested instead introducing a system of 'free labour' that would release Indigenous people from the paternal bonds of patronage and keep their 'hands' busy making a life through work – submitting Indigenous people to the demands of capitalist market forces; hushed, or whipped, by the 'invisible hand' to keep on providing a living for themselves (see the section on the hut tax in Chapter 3, 'Apartheid Architectures'). Such a proto-liberal form of capturing people and their lands within the grasp of colonial capitalism was further evident in the way Rhodes envisioned the transcontinental railway would join up colonial allies and benefit their extractive economies across eastern Africa:

Beyond the Zambesi the line will run through an excellent cattle country, densely populated by natives, and will, for many years to come, absorb the greater portion of the trade of the Upper Zambezi, the Upper Congo and the western portions of German East Africa, in addition to that of Northern Rhodesia. Over a great portion of this area, it is probable that an important industry in rubber and other vegetable products will be developed. Large areas of northern Rhodesia have already been proved to be highly mineralised, and valuable deposits of copper exists in the Congo State on the borders of the British South Africa Company's territories. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS Afr. 227, chapter 6, page 6.1)

Here, Rhodes envisioned *The Thin Red Line* as a form of inter-colonial lubrication that, on the one hand, holds out a promise of unlocking the continent's potential riches in 'natural' resources – rubber, copper, minerals, agro-products, cattle and people designated as 'natives' – and, on the other hand, consolidates the diplomatic ties between Britain and its neighbouring colonial allies. As grease added to the imperial war machine, the northern

railway extension would ease the extraction and circulation of goods, promising to 'absorb the greater portion of the trade' in East Africa.¹ Rhodes – once again – clearly censored the violent erasures of people on which the northern railway extension relied: the necessary decimation of territories 'densely populated by natives' and the subsequent submission of 'these people' as lease labour on his mines, farms and railway lines.

The archives are full of surveyor reports that map out potential line extensions and general managers assessing the overall performance of various agro- and mining businesses that might warrant further line extensions. By reading these reports alongside Rhodes's transcontinental vision it becomes evident that railway extensions were married with prospective agriculture business – crops, cattle, fruit trees, wine making, forestry and tile and brick production – and potential labour 'reserves.' The horizontal expanse and extension of railway lines facilitated the vertical piercing of 'bountiful' grounds and the maintenance of vertical hierarchies of power relations among Indigenous populations – accessing labour 'reserves' in the north to

¹ A major part of achieving this plan was establishing a connection and viable relation with the German East African office, and Rhodes was in constant communication with German officials and royalty (see Boffey 2021). In 1899 he wrote the following to the Under Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in Berlin, B. Von Bülow, with regard to extending his railway from Rhodesia through German East Africa to join up with British East Africa (Kenya and Egypt): 'My trans-African railway having now reached Bulawayo I desire to make arrangements for its extension to the Zambesi and thence northwards. Previous to settling its route, however, I wish to ascertain whether your Imperial Government would be willing to grant my Company the necessary rights for this purpose ... In the construction of the Dar-es-Salaam direct line and the German section of the trans-African German labour would be exclusively employed with the exception of engineers, contractors and natives.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. 228 Box 2, 189 and 190) *The Thin Red Line* drew a colour line of labour division across the continent that assured and ensured that white colonialists could distribute their armies of soldiers, engineers and managers to maintain effective control over Indigenous peoples and their lands. Across various reports that were sent to Rhodes, providing updates on the progress of line extensions, the designation 'native' and 'boys' reoccurs among ledgers that specify budgets and list costs as a nondescript category of lease or contract labour: expendable and disposable labour.

compete with and push down salaries paid on mine and farm work – to draw further racial colour lines.

Running ahead of Rhodes's dreams of red railway lines connecting farms and mines ran even thinner lines of copper. On Surveyor General Salisbury's map of the Inyanga valley, the '*thin blue line*' running north from Umtali marks the 'Telegraphic line to Tete', and while the dream of an intercontinental railway never came to fruition, the transcontinental telegraph did, forming an infrastructural precursor to the railway dream – a marker that lay down the inter-communicative web from which prospective topographies could be readied for railway extension.² Entrenched in the imperial networks that connected colonisers across the British 'dominions', Rhodes was in regular contact with fellow imperialists, sharing ideas, observations and experiences with successful techniques for capturing and managing land and, most importantly, the Indigenous populations. For example, in a letter to Rhodes dated 19 January 1899, 'Chrun', Postmaster General and Superintendent of Telegraphs in Adelaide, provides 'data' describing the techniques of the similar transcontinental telegraph line in Australia:

I had, as you are probably aware, long contemplated carrying a telegraph line across Australia from Adelaide to the North Coast ... We had some difficulties with the natives and a few sad murders were committed; but our relations with them are now quite friendly. The success was due to the careful organization ... Since the erection of the line we have experienced very little trouble in its working, and have had but few interruptions. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. 228 Box 2, 160 to 170)

² Simultaneously with the completion of the railway line between Cape Town and Kimberley, the telegraph line was extended and reached Salisbury by 1892, Lake Tanganyika by 1899 and Ujiji in western Tanzania by 1903. Having set up the African Transcontinental Telegraph Company, Rhodes was eager to extend the telegraph cables northwards to pre-empt the brokerage with German imperialists and thus smooth the way for the more financially demanding and uncertain investment in railway. In response to his letter of 1899 to the Under Secretary to the Imperial Chancellor of the German Empire in Berlin, B. von Bülow returned with good news for Rhodes, giving assurance that the 'Imperial Government' would be 'pleased to examine, if it will be able, to accede to your wishes', suggesting that 'the telegraph line may run alongside the railway' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. 228 Box 2, 191).

‘Wild natives,’ ‘sad murders,’ ‘now quite friendly’ – the mantra of British Imperialism: to dehumanise, obliterate and reconcile (as in the photograph in Figure 4.1). The ease at which ‘Chrun’ moves from murder to friendship – from foe to friend – demonstrates the psychosis necessary for British imperialists to justify their ‘incorporations.’ Attached to his letter is a detailed budget listing costings for each station, including salaries for the ‘Station Manager’ (£210 p/a), ‘Operator’ (£150 p/a), ‘Lineman’ (£4 p/d), ‘Carpenter’ (£5 p/d), ‘Cook’ (£5 p/d) and of course the labourers designated as ‘Natives’ (£1–2 p/d). Reading between the lines of the Telegraph Station ledger, one might question how these labourers designated as ‘natives’ made their way into the ledger. How did they avoid suffering the same fate as the ‘wild natives’ who ‘sadly’ lost their lives? The ledger hides more than it shows about the colour lines that are drawn through the transcontinental telegraph and railway lines, which formed perennial grounds for separating settlers and labourers from ‘natives,’ and further categorising these as either ‘friends’ or ‘foes’.

But Rhodes was unlikely seeking an ally with whom to confide in and seek approval of his brutal blood trail left across Africa. Instead, he sought to learn the technical know-how regarding telegraph polling and wire rolling and the wider purpose of telegraph stations in the white settler colonial project. As ‘Chrun’ continues: ‘We breed sheep and horses at several Stations, and in this respect are nearly self-supporting’ (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. 228 Box 2, 160 to 170).

By transforming each telegraph station among the remote passages into ‘self-supporting’ stations, they planted the seedlings for colonial botany’s wedding with settler colonial expansion. When Rhodes adopted this model through southern Africa, he ensured that each station master would become, in effect, a small-scale farmer who not only produced their own food but also, by cultivating the land, would incorporate the soil into the imperial war machine: red lines drawn across red earths to repopulate the continent with white spots.³ As Rhodes’ contemporary Williams approvingly comments,

³ With ‘repopulation,’ we refer to the settler colonial process of severing ties between Indigenous populations and their lands in order for colonial subjects to resettle on that very same land. To Rhodes, the extension of *The Thin Red Line* across the African continent was part of his tectonic-Teutonic vision, his white supremacist dream of creating a world consisting of four white, English-speaking continents of which Africa would be one (Yusoff et al. 2022).

'The range of British influence and civilizing advance now reaches the heart of Africa from the south... the grand aim of Rhodes has been swiftly advanced in realization beyond sanguine expectation' (1905: 235).

... White Spots

... as we passed along, we could look out and see the toiling farmer in his fields, the growing vine yards, and nurseries and orchards of fruit trees, and now and then a small village or hamlet, with its white cottages clustering at the foot of some gently sloping hill, verily it was a sight beautiful to see. ('One who has visited the fields' 1872: 50)

The preceding passage is taken from an anonymous account of 'One who has visited the fields', that is, the diamond fields, during the diamond fever at Kimberley in the 1870s. The narrator, who travelled by boat from London to Cape Town and by horse carriage through the Karoo to Kimberley, describes their wonder and appreciation of the cultivated landscapes. The 'beautiful' sight of 'white cottages' peppered throughout the landscape on occasion becomes the scene where the caravan stops for the night, checking in to various guest houses and inns. While railway lines were yet to connect these settlement villages, the carriage route was a precursor for gradual completion of railway tracks linking up the spots (see Figure 4.3). The narration of the physically demanding and time-consuming travel feeds a narrative of testing conditions that settlers and prospecting colonisers had to endure: sweltering heat, pestering insects and the relentless broiling sun. Train travel offered a means of making these conditions tolerable, an amalgam of steel and steam power that stabilised the sensory landscape that was perceived as hostile. The portal in this case offered a stabilisation of colonial normativity and control over environmental conditions.

In a similar fashion to Chrun's model of extending railway and telegraph lines through self-supporting agro-settlements at each station across the Australian continent, the piecemeal extension of *The Thin Red Line* established a connected series of stations leased to prospective station masters, forming an interconnected web of settlements, like white pearls on a string.

In August 1897 a tender was advertised in the *Diamond Fields Advertiser* by the Bechuanaland Railway Company for the lease and management of refreshment rooms along the railway line from Vryburg to Bulawayo (see Figure 4.4). The expectation of the Company was for the prospective station master to provide, as they specify in the contract issued in September that



Figure 4.3

Steam train at a railway stop by village, no title or geographical specification in original, c. 1900. Source: Photograph album purchased by the Bodleian at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. t. 59. page 13.

same year, 'light refreshments as in a good Hotel, Fresh Tea and Coffee, Fruit in Season and fresh milk and butter'. The standards of service comparable to that of a 'good Hotel' were meant to cushion white settlers and visitors from what was perceived as harsh 'elemental' conditions. James D. Logan & Company, which won the tender, wrote to J. L. Bissett, General Manager at Bechuanaland Railway Co in a telegram on 1 September 1897: 'we must in [the case when the train service is altered] be prepared to feed passengers wherever will suit them best' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. s. 228 Box C20 Railways M55). By ensuring the continuity of a sensorily stabilised tunnel, the fantasy of a clean and healthy body was upheld and continuously reproduced.

Refreshment stops on the railway lines were imagined to provide safe havens in which travelling subjects could step out of the confines of their train cars, rest assured that their safety and wellbeing remained intact. The refreshment rooms extended the comforts of cooled and well-ventilated passenger cars

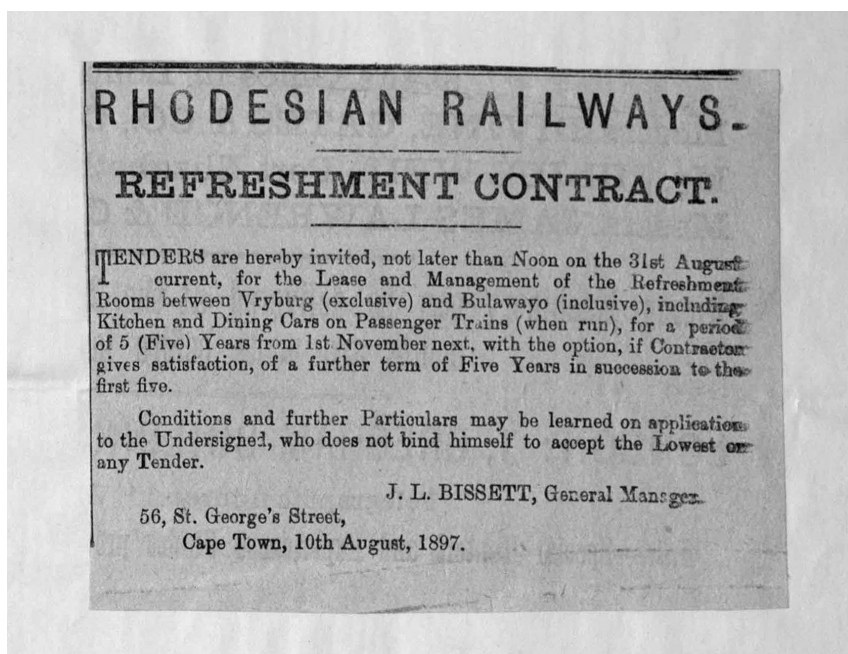


Figure 4.4

Newspaper cutting from *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, August 1897. Source: The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. 228 Box 21 Railways, M55.

to the territory through which they sought to make light travel. The train assemblage sanitised travel from the red dust and dirt that whirled in the wind, from insects that swarmed under the sun and, of course, from the people who through their designation as 'natives' were considered a potential threat to the northern European body. The train assemblage limited the Western body's exposure to the perceived hostilities of the African environment and its population, stabilising sensibilities along a corridor that smoothed circulation and eased the continuous stream of white settlement. It readied the land for white settlers to take hold of and make legal claims to land. Refreshment stops provided stepping stones for settlers to place themselves in the landscape and imagine themselves as potential owners of what their gaze took in. The refreshment rooms were portals through which white settlers could anchor and extend their dreams of a bifurcated continent under their rule. Refreshment stations maintained the white fantasy of purity and danger of the colonial body.

In the anonymous account of 'One who visited the fields,' the narrator describes their stay, in 'a little village of Ceres' along their passage: 'a good

supper of roast fowl, boiled eggs, vegetables and fruit, awaited us at the inn kept by a jolly Dutchman, and six hours were allowed for sleep' (1872: 52). Well-nourished and entertained by a fellow European, 'the One' continues to report on their progress through the veld, where, at Beaufort West, they make another stop for 'rest and refreshment' (1872: 55). Here, 'the One' recounts 'a refreshing bath was provided and used, followed by clean linen. Then dinner; after which a short rest, then a little exercise' (1872: 55). And the narrator continues:

I ought here to pay a proper compliment to two young ladies, daughters of the landlord of the inn at Beaufort West, for their kindness to us and their solicitude for our welfare while stopping there, and especially the elder one, who seemed to be a lady of the highest culture and refinement. I think none of the travellers expected to meet with such fair and accomplished ladies so far in the interior of Africa, especially beyond the wild, uncivilised, uncultivated regions we had passed through, and it was exceedingly enlivening and cheering to converse and again listen to the charming conversation of such ladies. Their home, also, was well furnished and adorned with many luxuries, having, as one, a fine piano, on which they played with considerable skill and taste. (1872: 55–56)

The gendered politics of care provided by the two 'accomplished ladies' at the refreshment stop concerned not only 'their kindness' and 'solicitude for our welfare' but also their role in entertaining the travellers with their skilled and tasteful use of 'a fine piano' and their ability to lead 'charming conversations'. The astonishment and admiration for the 'fair and accomplished' company stands in contrast to the 'wild, uncivilised, uncultivated' regions of the African interior, providing comfort, safety and experiential decompression from the perceived threats of the environmental surrounds. The account commends the kinds of care that women provided in the mining towns, both in the form of practical and physical care in hospitals, kitchens and 'house work', and also in the form of social, emotional and sex work in bars, brothels and shebeens. When read through a patriarchal lens, the railway infrastructure with its antecedent refreshments stops provides a portal that extends the politics of social reproduction from the mines and mining villages to refreshment stops and settlements, drawing a gendered thread that ties together the colonial complex of extraction in heteropatriarchal bondage (see Chapter 2, 'Mimesis and Madness'). As in all colonial societies, settler women have played a crucial role as agents of empire: organising the spatial arrangements of heteropatriarchy and providing the cultural conveyors of 'settlement' to ameliorate the violence of white hypermasculinity and the anxiety of what it means to 'settle' in stolen land. The jam making and piano playing furnished the fictional imaginary and affective structures of normativity in

the context of a necropolitics of imperialism. White domesticity soothes the forcible removal from land and ruptures of Indigenous societies in the wake of *The Thin Red Line*.

Another photograph, taken in 1899, depicts a newly completed refreshment station at a railway landing, cushioned in between the train tracks that run through the foreground and a mountain ridge in the background (see Figure 4.5). In the middle of the photograph, six white men are lined up on the platform, posing in front of the refreshment station with Rhodes – standing strident with his trademark all-whites and a Homburg hat – taking centre stage. Compared to everything around, his clothes are so immaculately white they're blinding, appearing overexposed. The six of them pose with slightly clenched jaws, cocksure and hands on hips.

Behind them, and almost at the edge of the photograph, four fellows are blurred out in the background. They appear to be taking refuge from the sun in the shade of the refreshment building: one stands a bit in front of the



Figure 4.5

Rhodes (centre) poses with a group of men on the platform of a new railway stop, no title or geographical specification in original, c. 1900. Source: Photograph album purchased by the Bodleian at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. t. 59, page 13.

others, leaning against a pole as he juts out his hip while placing his left arm firmly on top. He appears to be striking a pose. His dandy attire sparkles in the sun, and in a moment reminiscent of John Chilembwe's defiance of colonial rulers some 20 years later, he's wearing his own Homburg hat but not like Rhodes – who wears it placed on top of his head like a pork-pie – but rather slanted backwards. In the shadow of Rhodes he is making – or rather he is taking up – space of his own: I am in your dreams but you are not in mine.

It is no coincidence, as Hartman writes, that 'within slavery's shadow' we see the unfolding 'experiments in freedom' (2019: 17). Shadows are important not only for directing attention towards spaces of obscurity, where lives can elide the colonial gaze and take other forms, but also because they provide another kind of visibility. As discussed in Chapter 3, Canham (2023: 6) highlights how people can create shadows in order to illuminate by cupping their hand above their eyes, which is referred to in isiMpondo as *ukwakumkanya*: 'to block out distractions and draw into sharp relief ... It enables tunnel vision in order to focus the gaze ... to pause'. In shadows, we see the paucity of the image, the puncture of the image and time (in the machinations of anxious settler time), which opens up the image and the time-space it creates to other ways of inhabiting, allowing other lives to take form.

The defiance of the young man in dandy attire opens a portal where exuberance is the language and radiant humour is the vehicle for experimenting with ways of making a life in the shadow of colonialism. This portal is a rugged shadow space, a space that remains in the unfocused background blur, the almost overlooked lifeworld that ensures the viewer's focus is fixated on the six white men in front, who do not see the riot burning behind them.

In a world of thingification, vibrant personage remains unseen.

The Californian Method

Built under the aegis of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) – which was led under Rhodes's premiership⁴ – the railway-refreshment assemblage extended in piecemeal fashion north of Kimberley into Northern and Southern Rhodesia. In addition to the small-scale, self-sufficient farms dotted along

⁴ Rhodes served as the first director of the BSAC. He was removed from the role after the controversy of the Jameson Raid that also resulted in his removal from office as a Prime Minister of the Cape Colony. However, he retained effective control over the BSAC up until his death in 1902.

the main railway lines, Rhodes invested heavily in large-scale agro-business, buying up existing farms, vineyards and orchards, particularly around two sites: Stellenbosch in the Cape, which later became known as Rhodes Fruit Farms and in the Inyanga Valley in the Umtali district in Southern Rhodesia, which became known as Rhodes Farm. While Rhodes had been buying land during his rise to prime minister of the Cape Colony – most notably the Groote Schuur estate in Mowbray just outside Cape Town – it wasn't until he lost his premiership following the Jameson Raid in 1896 that his strategic involvement in agriculture expanded.

With his defeat, he came to terms with his diminished political influence and shifted his attention towards 'the interior,' away from the transcontinental railway and towards establishing capillary railway lines to support his agriculture and mining ventures, particularly in North and South Rhodesia (see Lunn 1992; Phimister 1988). Guided by land surveyors who prospected land for potential untapped resources and farmers who inspected existing estates to assess their potential production value, Rhodes's farming operations expanded rapidly; drawing inspiration from the modern industrial-scale farming methods in California, his means of cultivation intensified. The portal of extension gathered planetary momentum. Yet, his interests in farming were never about producing marmalade, wine or angora blankets as such. Just like diamond and gold mining were but geo-financial auxiliaries that exalted his dream of continental domination, farming was a means for domesticating the landscape and reconfiguring it into pastoral scenes for white settlers to inhabit and white tourists to visit, thus completing the severance of ties between Indigenous populations and their claims to land through a change of its (environmental) state. Farming was settlement as severance in a white supremacist dream of continental replacement.

In a speech he gave at the House of Assembly on 6 July 1887, Rhodes stressed the need to extend the colonial presence north, from the mines of Kimberley into Southern and Northern Rhodesia:

I feel that the present is a golden opportunity which may not soon recur ... The country itself, however, is in my opinion admirably adapted for stock farming, the veld being equal to any to be found in any part of South Africa: and with cheaper communication, not only would the natives be stimulated to greater industry in the development of their resources, but an opportunity would be afforded to encourage farmers to settle on the large tracts of country at present unoccupied. There would thus be a reasonable prospect of the Protectorate becoming a self-supporting community within a certain

time. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS Afr 227 Chapter 6, page 3.1)

‘Prospect’ and ‘golden opportunity’ become the frames through which ‘a self-supporting community’ can insert itself into ‘unoccupied’ land – speculative devices that naturalise the rights of ‘farmers to settle’ at the expense of ‘natives.’ As part of this nexus of speculative dreaming, prospecting of land was instrumental in providing scientifically informed understandings of probable yields and profits. Numerous surveyor reports remain in the archives that in detail describe landscape characteristics, soil qualities, water reservoirs and streams, existing crop and forestry, and settlements. One such report was authored by the government land surveyor H. J. Pickett, who upon inspecting the six farms in the Inyanga Valley, block by block, wrote the following:

‘Anglo-French Block ... very good land both from a stock raising and agricultural point of view ... with plenty of water and land over which the former could be led.’

‘Jaeger’s Block: this block consists of six farms all well waters and if anything a larger percentage of good crop soil and land than you find on other parts. Every stream can be utilised and carried over the land round them.’

‘Vignes block ... called Erin and is really as good if not better than any of the others ... there are a number of natives living on this which of course is a good sign.’ (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 13)

The Indigenous population is not conceived of as land owners in these statements. They are not depicted as the rightful claim-holders to the land on which they live – in the form of property rights. Rather, they constitute ‘a good sign,’ markers of ‘prospect’ and ‘opportunity,’ in the way they are rendered as mere properties *of* the landscape, jumbled together with the rich soils, lush vegetation and plentiful water streams; they are naturalised as a shining lure for future capital gains to be extracted from the landscape (reproducing the logic of objectification evident in Figure 4.1). Take this report from a farm manager in Rhodesia, reporting on 28 May 1897 to Rhodes: ‘the general fertility of farms cannot be better described, than by stating the fact, that the natives carry the cultivation to the hill tops.’

The dehumanising categorisation of Indigenous people as ‘natives’ features across land surveyor reports and in the ledgers and books that farm managers submitted periodically to Rhodes. Listing expenses for all the items that have been purchased – from poles to wires, fencing to masonry, saplings to grain, cattle to carpenters – the labour designated as ‘native’ is only ever

mentioned in the reports with notes of either surprisingly good behaviour or when they disappoint or prove challenging. Concern and care is only ever expressed for the health of crops and the wellbeing of animals. Take the farm manager Grimmers who on 29 February 1901 reported the following from Inyanga Farm:

'29 February 1901 ... I am almost satisfied that this is a sheep country ... To have angoras up here one must have shedding handy everywhere. They cannot stand the cold drizzle we get.'

'Pigs ... do awfully well and there is a big future for ham and bacon business here. We are now eating Inyanga ham and bacon and it is awfully good.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 13)

The tone of care to the wellbeing of animals shifts dramatically as Grimmers turns his attention to the local population, who seem to be causing quite some distress:

'I find the n*****s have taken up a lot more ground and are not as well in hand as they should be. I am writing the department and laying before them my plans of dealing with them for the future.'

'29 May 1901 ... Natives ... We had all the Chiefs in and explained to them the rules and regulations for the future. They were quite satisfied, and I hope will remain so for the future ... I wish you would send me a power to act for you in matters relating to these farms. I must have it for the signing of the agreement with the n*****s.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 13)

Africans signified as a labour force – whether Indigenous tribes and chiefdoms or migrated labour from across the region – are clearly annoying Grimmers, maybe even causing him some concern as they refuse to abide by his 'hand,' taking 'up a lot more ground' than he feels they rightly should. Somehow, they slip through the calculative matrices that are supposed to demarcate and delineate where they should be and what to do within that space. As they are employed to pole the ground and roll out fences, they somehow refuse to perform enclosure along Grimmers' imagined lines. We do not know if they actively disobey, even if in the minor key. We do not know if they refuse, demonstrating resistant power and indomitability in the face of brutish Brits. We do know that Grimmers reassures Rhodes that he will be 'dealing with them for the future' and later confirms that the chiefs are satisfied with 'the rules and regulations for the future.'

While Grimmers refers to the chiefs of Indigenous tribes, his disparaging use of the n-word hides the organised racial distinctions that were being made between different kinds of African groups that would have been working on the farms. As Kundai Manamere (2020: 404) demonstrates, white settlers started cultivating rural land in Southern Rhodesia by ‘importing’ Black migrant labour from South Africa, Nyasaland (Malawi) and other colonies across the southern region to work on the farms (and mines). The migrating labour forces were preferable among white settlers because they ‘were considered civilised as compared to indigenous “natives” [and] had no access to land’ (Manamere 2020: 404). Migrant labour forces were ‘easier’ to deal with because their ties had already been severed from their lands and therefore they came in search of employment; thus, they were more likely to abide by the white man’s ‘rules and regulations.’ Farming thus emerges as a geo-ethnic method for ridding Indigenous populations of rights to land and repopulating it first with white settlers and then with migrant and indentured labour, who can act as intermediaries, managing and maintaining race relations and hierarchies in the service of white settlers (see Manamere 2020; Muzondidya 2004). The geo-ethnic arrangements of changing the state of the environment through farming and mining is both how geology as racial violence is enacted and how it is mobilised as a planetary portal that connects to the geomorphic transformation of colonialism and settler colonialisms elsewhere.

The geo-ethnic process of repopulation of land is furthermore evident on Rhodes Fruit Farms, comprising over 20 farms in Stellenbosch that Rhodes purchased and cultivated with the aid of Harry Pickstone, a British farmer who had gained experience with modern, industrial-scale fruit farming in California. Pickstone was employed to modernise Rhodes’s entire farming operation, turning the acquired Afrikaaner vineyards – that had suffered from a recent *phylloxera* pest – into profitable ones, and expanding the agricultural output to include fruits, vegetables and livestock while also securing the labour necessary to sustain them. To accommodate this, Rhodes financed the construction of cottages, schools and a church to house and serve migrant labour communities, the development of which Pickstone reports with regards to the farm Languedoc:

‘21 June 1900 ... Re Languedoc ... you insisted on my filling the 82 cottages ... I anticipated great difficulty ... I now have the pleasure of reporting to you that the cottages are filling up rapidly. We have already accepted or partially accepted 15 Cottages, which will mean about 70 inhabitants and about 20 grown up men available for our work ... I have been materially assisted by Rev Mr Reinecke of Ceres, whom you know. He has

been of service to us in regard to our labour during the last three years. This gentleman is scouting all through the lower Karoo and the districts of Ceres, Worcester, Tulbagh, Swellendam ... You will be glad to hear that Mr Reinecke and myself had a very satisfactory interview with the Rev Mr Stigman of Pniel ... He is exceedingly pleased re the lines on which we are going to run this Village ... He suggests our running our own Church and school combined.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. S. 228 Box 8 Farms, 30)

'16 July 1900 ... I was satisfied with the progress made towards filling Languedoc ... and have now 41 men, a good sprinkling of women and a whole lot of children ... Every single inhabitant has come from the division of Worcester, which is of course bringing an entirely new stock of labour into our districts ... I may say I am agreeably surprised at the ready way in which the laborers adapt themselves to the regulations of the Village and their new conditions. There are already a number of them working on several of your Farms ... I am holding the whole crowd with a good tight rein.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. S. 228 Box 8 Farms, 31)

'4 August 1900 ... In the matter of Languedoc, we now have about 50 boys. ... Mr Reinecke comes down here next week to start of the school both for children and Adults, more particularly the latter, and I shall explain to him he must consider another touting expedition to bring in more tenants.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. S. 228 Box 8 Farms, 31)

The establishment of entirely new villages drew missionaries into the railway-refreshment-farming assemblage: reverends were deployed on expeditions to scout the country for potential labour. As if herding their lambs in spiritual guidance, reverends not only converted their faith but ensured their status or categorisation changed from 'inhabitants' to 'men' to 'boys'. This was a slow but steady process of dehumanisation through displacement and employment, stripping people of their basic rights *to* their land to form instead 'an entirely new stock of labour' *on* their land. To Pickstone's surprise, they adapted to 'their new conditions' of 'Village life' seemingly without problems and played by the 'regulations' that the reverends imposed on them. Arrive to abide by the 'good tight rein'. Not 'well in hand' but held well tight by that 'good tight rein'. 'An entirely new stock of labour': Stripped of your humanity to serve the inhumanity of settler colonialism. Appearing 'quite satisfied' with the 'regulations of the Village'.

Reports from farm managers like Grimmers and Pickstone that detail the challenges and successes in enforcing 'rules and regulations' to manage Indigenous populations and labour are in abundance in the archive. Yet, on the farms, the managers' attention towards the Indigenous and migrant 'stock of labour' is not only evident in the planning of villages and 'herding' of people but also in crop selection and cultivation strategies, in terms of

cost-effectively sustaining a labour force. As Matthew W. White, a farm manager on one of the farms in Rhodesia reports in 1889:

The three grain crops grown here are Rukwazi, (small millet) K***ir Corn, (Large millet) and Mealies. Of these Rukwazi is preferred far beyond all the others, the natives say that two meals a day of Rukwazi, is better than three of mealie meal, but as other natives are coming into the country whose sole food has been mealie meal it will not do to neglect their cultivation. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 13)

Race relations were managed through crop diversification and divestment. Crops unknown to white people are familiarised through attention to indigenous preferences. As markers, Indigenous people and their preferences direct strategic decision-making towards that which will be 'useful' to the colonisers – what will nourish the labouring population and be profitable market products. Yet it is not only their tastes and desires that matter but also their intimate knowledge of the soil from which they have been dispossessed:

The soil is of two kinds, black and red. The black in the hollows, the red upon the more elevated portions, and the crop grown upon the red soil – I am now particularly referring to wheat – is smaller than the other, it is sounder grain, and makes better bread. But the greater portion of the area referred to is black. K***ir grains seem to thrive equally well upon both. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 13)

Intimate knowledge of how to inhabit the environment, how to live *in* it and *from* it, feeds directly into the industrial complex of agro-farming, as markers of where to speculate on future profits (wheat upon the elevated portions) and which grains to bet on ('K***ir grains' will grow anywhere), thus collapsing the categories that designate people and grains into one of 'husbandry'.

Yet, once this knowledge of crops, soil and weather conditions had been extracted, the Indigenous populations were rendered obsolete, treated as surplus to requirements. Take Pickstone, who harboured bleached plans for Rhodes's farming operations, as evident in this letter dated 7 August 1901, in which he proposes further racialised farming-village expansion under his tutelage:

My idea is to make it a white village. Allow me to import families on lines which I carry in my head. What is the position? We need white men and white women ... giving employment to say 800 people, mostly women ... I see distinctly that you hold in your

hand a practical scheme for the successful introduction of white families who will be permanently satisfied for the simple reason that their position will be comfortable for there will be work for man and wife, if she requires it, and children above fourteen of both sexes – in fact the Californian method. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 8, 42P)

Comfortable. Caucasian. The *Californian Method*. Clearly, Pickstone had not only gained experience with modern, industrial-scale fruit farming in California but also how to rid landscapes of Indigenous populations and repopulate them with white Europeans – a different kind of ‘white replacement theory’ that is espoused by Elon Musk and his Grok AI bot. The *Californian Method* stands both for the application of modern science to manipulate the climate and environmental conditions to optimise yields, as well as the organisation of land and race relations. Underpinning this geology of race (Yusoff 2024: 32) is the transformation of environments to grow white supremacy. Thus, the portal is a rearrangement of states of being and states of the environment towards an ‘ideal’ state of planetary whiteness (built on a racial deficit of dehumanising Black subjects and amputating connections to land while utilising environmental knowledges that are the epistemological binds of that relation). The twin aims of applying modern science to harness farm operations and race relations is evident in another letter sent to Rhodes on 10 May 1899 from Alfred Mosely, diamond merchant at Kimberley, who travelled to California and reported on ‘the effect that Fruit culture might be carried out at the Cape on Californian Lines’:

... the farmers practically defy the elements by a system of careful irrigation to ensure the trees obtaining the necessary moisture, and that at the right time: thereby improving on nature which might give the rain too soon or too late for the particular crop. ... (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 8, 20D)

The latest and most improved machinery is used and saves labor to an amazing extent: in fact, I could only compare the whole of the plant to a gigantic human being, so excellently does it run and without any effort on the part of the workmen: all being done by electricity, with the men themselves out of sight. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 8, 20I)

‘Improving on nature’ by defying its ‘elements’; ‘improved machinery’ by ‘saving labour’: the corrective function of modern science was to remove any dependency on the unpredictable and unruly forces of the ‘elements’ and ‘labour’. And not only were modern scientific farming methods and

mechanisation of labour means of manipulating these forces under the aegis of 'improvement' but the means through which to completely obliterate their existence altogether. Yet, just like the establishment of railway lines proved challenging due to their heavy capital investment, the process of full modernisation of farming operations was costly and therefore still relied on the Ponzi scheme, pioneered on the diamond fields, of labour made 'cheap' through directed racial violence to operate and advance. As Mosely continues in his comparison of California and the Cape:

California has the pull in regards to soil and water ... the Cape would have one in cheap labour, this costing 1/- at the Cape against a dollar in California for rough work that in the one country could be done by natives, and in the other falls to the lot of the China**n. (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr.s.228 Box 8, 20A)

Again, alongside the surveying of the landscape character, its soil quality, water reservoirs and climatic conditions, labour, whether indentured or Indigenous, is rendered part of the landscape as a 'natural reserve' of workforce. People are rendered as pliable labour, waiting and ready to do the 'Rough work'. This waiting room of colonialism was configured in the anticipatory tense and temporality of pre-colonial settlement that imagined a homogeneous arrow of time assembled through the empirical furniture of railways, farms, jam, patriarchy, refreshments, telegraphs, bureaucracy and so on.

The *Californian Method* is, however, not restricted to the management of labour to work the soil but also to quite literally to break that land and turn it inside out: a planetary method transposed across varied continental geographies to extend the colonial project of capture. From nurturing 'self-supporting communities' to creating a self-sufficient construction business, Pickstone saw the potential to build his white villages from the clay-rich soils of the estate, proposing to venture into tile and brick making – a business not unfamiliar to Rhodes from his time in Dalston, London:

'21 June 1900 ... there is going to be a fortune in Brick making ... it is quite possible should a large Factory be equipped, that a monopoly of the Cape Brick making could be obtained.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr.s.228 Box 8, 30B)

'4 August 1900 ... if you intend to add bricks to the tile business the thing would have to be done on a much larger scale ... the deposit of Clay is unlimited in extent and unless the thing is done on the biggest possible scale so that nobody else can start in

and compete there would not be much in it.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 8, 31)

More than the prospect of making 'a fortune' is the possibility of creating 'a monopoly', which – as with the amalgamation of the diamond-mining operations – Rhodes knew very well would secure not only control over profits but unleash a much further reaching power over land. Despite the 'unlimited' resources for tile and brick production, 'there would not be much in' the venture if not to ensure a total monopoly. As Rhodes discovered with regard to diamonds, the abundance of the gem meant that the market was flooded with diamonds at peaks, causing the prices and thus profits from diamonds to dive; therefore, monopolising production and distribution was the sole solution to make business profitable (see Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine'). Similarly, only by way of monopoly and thus by hindering competitors from starting production would the tile and brick-making business be profitable. And it appeared that in the rich soils, Rhodes had a quality product on his hands. Together with the tile manager, Innes, Pickstone had been sampling the clay, reporting on their findings:

'4 August 1900 ... We have submitted samples of your bricks and tiles to the leading Architects, Builders, the Railway Department, C Engine of Cape Town &c, &c, and they are unanimous in stating that the bricks are of a very superior quality, in fact are of a better quality than has ever been produced here.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 8, 31B)

'Rigby the Corporation Superintendent of the large Stormwater drainage scheme in Cape Town has imported five million bricks and on seeing our samples said that if price was as Innes stated and quality was as he saw before him he would not have imported a brick and that he has made indents for his bricks two years ahead all to come from England...' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 8, 31F and 31G)

'Mr Quinan ... says he would at once give us an order for 1,000,000 if we could execute and in any way he will take as many as we can turn out I understood him to say for the next three years.' (The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS.Afr.s.228 Box 8, 31G)

Across land surveyor and farm management reports, the gathering of evidence to convince Rhodes of the potential investment in one business venture or another reveals what feeds speculative dreams. Naming soil, wood, clay, diamond or labour resources as unlimited is a speculative device that nurtures the dream of continental power; power not just to decide what to invest in and when, but how the power that comes with owning every step of

every production chain unleashes in the political realm. Yet, despite Rhodes's riches, he was constantly hunting for investors, which meant that even the most promising ventures were apprehended with caution and with careful work to ensure that someone could put down the payment to make the venture viable. And to attract investors the farms took on a second important role, as both an attraction in and of themselves and as a platform to stage the products that might warrant further investment (for more on white repopulation and settlement see the Conclusion, 'Diamond Power!').

Birth Canal

By the time Rhodes became prime minister of the Cape Colony in 1890, he had already been made managing director of the BSAC and chairman of De Beers, wielding immense political and corporate power through his combined executive roles. To match his growing influence in the region and beyond, he set out to secure an estate that could function as his headquarters – a base from which to conduct business and host meetings and receptions with business associates, political colleagues and the occasional important guests. Having previously served as a residence and summer retreat for British governors, Groote Schuur conveyed some of the grandeur he sought. He signed a lease on the property in 1891 and then bought the freehold in 1893, along with a number of farms surrounding the grounds. Having created an 1,500 acre estate at the foot of Devil's Peak, Groote Schuur quickly became 'a constant hive of activity' with Rhodes's life revolving 'around a succession of luncheon and dinner parties ... [and] receptions on the stoep' (Meredith 2007: 254).

Rhodes commissioned the British architect Herbert Baker to renovate the main house, maintaining the Dutch architectural style while adding a new front, a long stoep at the back, an additional block for kitchens and staff and a new wing that contained an extra billiard room and lodgings. Baker would later become Rhodes's principal architect, drawing both Rhodes Cottage in Boschendal and the Cecil Rhodes memorial. However, during his first job for Rhodes, he noted his surprise at the brevity of Rhodes's instructions and his seeming lack of architectural knowledge and taste. Rhodes is quoted to have told Baker to renovate Groote Schuur according to principles of 'big and simple, barbaric, if you like ... nothing petty or finkin' ... I like teak and white-wash' (Rhodes quoted in Meredith 2007: 251).

In the archives, we find books full of photographs that document the result of Baker's work as he gives shape to Rhodes's vision. But, if the architecture

was to be big and unfussy, the gardens, fields, forests and zoo that Rhodes built were arranged to both cushion the main house from the surroundings and to insert the house into a scene of rural idyll. In these images, we look at the estate gardens as they extend into the foot of the dramatically rising Devil's Peak, enthralling the estate in a sense of majestic, magical idyll. Neatly arranged flower beds, symmetric bushes and flattening lawns. A tea house, a bench, scenically placed in the landscape while turning the gaze of its users towards the landscape scene. As Louise Green writes:

The hydrangeas are also a frequently mentioned feature of the Groote Schuur estate, particularly their color viewed in contrast to the dark pines. None of these plants are indigenous to the Western Cape. Rhodes's vision is of a parkland complete with the 'exotics' that were a fashionable part of English practices of landscaping ... the evocation of nature as confirming the gesture of ownership. (Green 2020a: 82)

The calmness and silence in these pristine scenes photographed at Groote Schuur is deafening. The serenity is haunting. The neat arrangements are disturbing. The English Garden does that. With reference to the trope of English gardens featuring in British 19th and 20th-century literature, Brand (2020: 33–34) asserts that:

This appeal to the English natural world – the beauty and quiet, the less mad, the sane, the rightful order – it is the justification for all that must be done to maintain the colonial logic. England and the English psyche remain tranquil and uncontaminated.

Tying the maintenance of a tranquil and uncontaminated English psyche to the organisation and ordering of the garden is evident in how Rhodes spoke about his space: "“Why do I love my garden?” he [Rhodes] replied to a visitor one day. “Because I love to dream there. Why not come with me and dream also tomorrow morning”" (Rhodes quoted in Green 2020a: 81). If we consider these tranquil scenes as attempts to extend dreams of an English rural idyll, we might read the scenes around Groote Schuur as stakes in the future – the remaking of southern Africa in the dream of white settlers, whereby ecology is a narrative accomplice in the making of supremacy. Yet, among these photographs of the estate, one stands out.

In Figure 4.6, we see not Groote Schuur, but instead we approach the estate from the road running by the main gate. The presidential palace lies mystically hidden behind a tree-lined fence and the avenue leading to it: the rising pines have Devil's Peak rising behind, creating a dramatically



Figure 4.6

Entrance to Groote Schuur, Cape Town, no date. Source: The Rhodes Archive at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. 1910 Groote Schuur.

vertical scenography that acts as a kind of barrier or aperture – a portal. The angle of the photograph prevents us from seeing all the way up the avenue, as if intentionally tickling our urge to peek around the corner, to peer up that arboreous birth canal to see what lies at the end. What kind of diabolical being might sit there on the stoep, awaiting in all-whites at the foot of Devil's Peak?

The archives and history books suggest that we might very well have found Rhodes himself, or at least a faction of his entourage engaged in one of their never-ending 'luncheons and dinner parties' (Meredith 2007: 254). The angle of the photograph eclipses this image, creating instead an anticipation of this grandeur of power. But what prevents us from confirming this image of frolicking festivity amidst the blooming petunias and hydrangeas is not the angle of the photo – that just entices an urge to see, to know – but rather, the two people standing guard at the gate, or children, that is. There is something unsettling about the perverse staging of Rhodes's presidential palace by two, racially stratified, children.

Possibly aged nine or ten the two stand guard: one is a white boy wearing a uniform, cap and shoulder bag, while the other, Black, wears a uniform, a hat and his own shoulder bag. The hat, which is not typical of South African tribes but rather of East or North African hats such as the Kufi or the Askari's fez, indicates that this boy might have come from elsewhere or is dressed to appear so – informed by word sent along Rhodes's telegraph cables and travelling along Rhodes's railway lines to seek employment in South Africa (or possibly by foot). Possibly a bossboy, intermediary labourer working in the service of empire in the hope of securing a better future for himself? Or maybe, as illegally recruited labour, what otherwise was known as blackbirding – the coercion of people into labour through trickery and kidnapping – he might have been the victim of abduction (see Manamere 2020). However, it is unlikely that a kidnapped child would have been given the task of standing guard to control traffic at the gates – promotion as a priced personal asset to Rhodes seems more likely. There is no mention of these child-servants in the diaries of Rhodes or elsewhere in the archive, but we can imagine how they have become ensnared in his infrastructural complex in ways that might blur our understanding of this child as either victim of colonial rule or beneficiary of his position.

In his speculative engagement with partial archives that describe the lives of bossboys on the Triangle Sugar Estate in Rhodesia, Manamere (2020) draws attention to the ambiguous positions that bossboys and other migrant labour took up in colonial Rhodesia and post-colonial Zimbabwe. In some instances, he argues, the workers and residents on the farm 'feel that the

estate has cushioned them from the country's post-colonial economic crisis by providing them with jobs, subsidised housing, healthcare and education' (Manamere 2020: 407). Security in employment, housing, healthcare and education came at a price, though – bossboys frequently took part in the daily management of labour forces, including punishment of those who failed to complete their daily tasks. We cannot read much of the bossboys' role in such activities from the photograph. His body language doesn't tell us much. But the photograph does suggest that the serenity of the pastoral landscape engulfing Rhodes's estates relied on a combination of violent brute force and paternalistic patronage, which was informed by the orchestration of gendered and racial hierarchies, whether indentured, coerced, employed or invited.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have explored the advancing railway infrastructures in late 19th-century southern Africa as a planetary portal of extension, in the sense that it reached beyond the mine to create an interconnected web that scaled up the violent process of reconfiguring earth and soil relations into a colonial project. As an imperial portal of extension, the railway infrastructure both compressed space and time by making it easier and cheaper to move resources, minerals and bodies across space, and provided a tunnelled cocoon that decompressed the tense vexations that the fraught and frightened European bodies expressed when exposed to the environmental conditions. Mobilised across continents, the imperial portal of extension initiated the planetary spread of pastoral dreams of creating contained landscapes by establishing refreshment stops and stations. These became perennial testing grounds for extending agro-business and settlement to create bleached villages and towns, delivering the heartland of the white supremacist dream of repopulating the continent. Yet, within this complex, the chapter has drawn attention to the limitations of this dream: the reality that hints at its mere fictive existence as little more than a psychotic nightmare. By drawing attention to the peripheral lives that occupied the spaces and worked within and alongside the infrastructural complex, we are impelled to recognise the potential for other stories of compression and decompression to take place.



5

Data Dreams

From its very inception, colonialism configured dissociative architectures through its material transformation, spatially and conceptually separating its aesthetics of world-building from its shattering of worlds being lived. Imaginaries that consolidated the speculative portals of racial capitalism gave an often banal, dream-like quality to the normalcy of this pathology, maintained by the above and below of the wealth generation to the environmental-racial deficit diamond (Figures 0.3 and 0.4). Recalling Brand's assertion about the tranquil, uncontaminated English garden as the overlay to colonial violence, the architectures that hold imaginaries in geographical place tend towards the reassuring, placid and bland: in Figures 5.1 and 5.2 an image of a nondescript data centre branded 'The Soul of AI' sits next to a photograph of the Rhodes tribute roundabout in Bulawayo. Both architectures are aids to the stabilisation of the portal of extraction, rendered in an aesthetics that uses suburban normativity to hold together an *aesthetics of dissociation* that dispels the portal of the dependencies on which they rest. The ecology, subjects and environments that power the possibility of this disassociation are entirely absent. The dream of empire that a suburban roundabout conjures, awaiting its traffic, a high-rise building in the background to signal modernity and neat road markings that manifest order all speak to the promise and ideological terrain of settlement without unsettlement, affectively, temporally and *sans* violence.

The Samasource (now just Sama) data service centre similarly performs its neutrality and disguises the compound procedures that are nestled within and drawn from without; its imperial dreams of AI still provide the parameters of what it means to be human in the terrain of digital colonialism. The dream of data is also a dream of accumulation through the regulation of the terms of participation (Gabrys 2022: 246). On a basic material level the data centre's computational dreamworld disassociates from the liveability of a planet, as it reinterns the planetary in new forms of racialised subjugation for its production and demands unsustainable extraction of energy and water. AI needs a functioning ecosystem, while



Figure 5.1

The offices of Samasource, Nairobi, Kenya, 2022. Source: Khadija Farah for *TIME Magazine*, available from <https://time.com/6147458/facebook-africa-content-moderation-employee-treatment/> (accessed 30 June 2025).

it rapidly erodes the continuance of those ecologies without renewal or replenishment. The placement and concentration of data centres and critical infrastructures on the African continent are organised through colonial historical geographies of English-speaking countries – South Africa and Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana, where the majority of Big Tech infrastructures are located for the rapid development of AI on the African continent – and the fibre-optic undersea pipeline connections to Europe and North America. While data infrastructures are sold as the promise of prosperity and progress, they leave in their wake displacement (severing communities from their rights to land and water use), trauma of labour, environmental degradation and waste, and the bureaucratic debris of racial segregation (Mavhunga 2023). The planetary is materialised through these portals and their imperial path-portal dependencies of extraction, while the aesthetics tell a different story.

This chapter runs against the aesthetics of AI in Africa to unearth the shadow geologies, ghost economies and bureaucratic debris that make the data dreams of the continent possible. The world-building imaginaries of



Figure 5.2

Photograph of statue of Cecil Rhodes on roundabout in Bulawayo (Zimbabwe, formerly Rhodesia), 1960, INF10/285 (17). Source: Crown Corporation, Archive of Rhodesia & Nyasaland, National Archives, Kew.

AI depend on labour, infrastructure and bureaucracy to form what might be understood as an ‘AI archive’: a planetary-level epistemology that structures new ontologies of data commensurability and interpretative stability. In this way, the chapter argues that data is configured as a ‘mine as paradigm’ (Yusoff 2021): through the refracted light of an inverted prism, it generates a suck on resources and produces chronogeographies that sever alternate earth relations and epistemologies in the hungry pursuit of energy and the expansion of techno-racial-capitalism.

The Ghost Labour of AI

In 2024, the Kenyan courts ruled that Meta (the owner of Facebook and Instagram) and the digital services contractor Sama could be sued for breaking Kenyan employment law (based on the 2007 Employment Law and Labour Relations Law). The court case was widely reported as it signalled a victory for

national jurisdictions and unionisation across the world by showing that Big Tech firms (referring mainly to technology firms based in Silicon Valley that operate globally) were not exempt from complying with local laws and could be held accountable for unfair labour practices, which in the Kenyan context included exploitative working conditions, low pay, union-busting activity and inflicting psychological harm on employees. *Time Magazine* followed the court case through the story of Daniel Motaung, a graduate from South Africa who had responded to a recruitment advertisement from Sama and was hired as a content moderator in its data service centre in Nairobi. Motaung had suffered post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from annotating horrific material for use in the large language models (LLMs) of Meta's social media algorithms (Perrigo 2022, 2023). He was unfairly dismissed in 2019 when he tried to form a union to address poor working conditions and low pay. In an article titled 'The Ghost Workers Powering the AI Economy,' *Forbes Magazine* reported on this hidden labour force of annotative workers as fuelling the shadow economies of AI that undergird the extending data infrastructures and inflated imaginaries of AI for Africa. According to the report, data services have

helped to create a world in which the haves are increasingly well off, while the have nots make do with insecure and poorly paid work. Nowhere is this exchange more evident than in the data annotation industry, where people from around the world help to prepare and tidy up the data used by the tech giants to train the algorithms upon which their fortunes increasingly rest. (Gaskell 2019)

This tidying up of data happens in data service centres operating on the outskirts of major towns and cities such as Gulu in northern Uganda and Nairobi. Data service centres house rows and rows of computer stations where mainly young people are hired at low cost to perform the repetitive tasks of annotating and labelling huge volumes of media, including photographs, films and posts generated by internet and social media users. Motaung became known as a whistleblower when he spoke out, alerting the media about the psychological harms of annotating traumatic content. A class action has since formed, represented by the London-based law firm Foxglove that campaigns for just and responsible technology, and more annotative workers have stepped forward to talk about their experiences. Sonia Kgomo, writing in *The Guardian*, outlined the personal costs of annotative labour:

It was not just the type of content I had to watch that gave me insomnia, anxiety and migraines, it was the quantity too. In Sama we had something called AHT, or action handling time. This was the amount of time we were given to analyse and rate a piece

of content. We were being timed, and the company measured our success in seconds. We were constantly under pressure to get it right. You could not stop if you saw something traumatic. You could not stop for your mental health. You could not stop to go to the bathroom. You just could not stop. We were told the client, in our case Facebook, required us to keep going. (Kgomo 2025)

Annotative workers deal with often violent, traumatic images and video content that is then erased from the algorithms that power the social media and generative AI platforms of major companies such as Meta, Google and OpenAI. This involves applying labels that acknowledge, bear witness to and describe the violence at the machine learning entry point. The psychological effects of this cleansing activity are recounted by Sonia Kgomo (2025) among others as causing ‘migraines, anxiety, insomnia’: known symptoms of PTSD. Motaung was more explicit in describing the content he was tasked with annotating: ‘You get child pornography, you get bestiality, necrophilia, harm against humans, harm against animals, rapings,’ he said. ‘You don’t see that on Facebook as a user. It is my job as a moderator to make sure you don’t see it’ (Pilling and Murgia 2023).

Violence begets violence, relates Motaung, as he reflects on his own growing desire to label even worse content: ‘You get to a point, after you’ve seen 100 beheadings, when you actually start hoping that the next one becomes more gruesome. It’s a type of addiction’ (Pilling and Murgia 2023). Motaung’s and Kgomo’s experiences resound with the conditions of Kimberley mine workers drafted into exploitative working conditions and tasked with sorting and cleaning raw diamonds, brushing away the earth from which they came, in preparation for their consumption in the wealthier markets of the world (see Chapter 1, ‘Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine’). Cleaning data and cleaning the diamond share the same commercial end of preparing the resource for market by removing traces of how it was produced and, by doing so, erasing the racial violence of its modes of production (Holden and Harsh 2023).

The experiences of annotative labourers reveal how violence is constitutive of AI. Violence is built into how AI interprets, structures and moralises the world that it then calculates and patterns for social media and internet users. Violence makes the inflated imaginaries of AI for Africa, of seamless technologised futures, possible through the shadow geologies of mineral extraction, infrastructural extension and environmental degradation. Violence is evident in the labour practices of major companies, in the suppression and silencing of unions, exploitative working conditions, neglect of employees’ health and wellbeing, unfair firings and disregard of local laws. It is also evident in the geopolitical tensions that play out across the world as rival titan companies

compete to be first past the post and claim market primacy and global domination. Alongside this Ponzi scheme of techno-racial-capitalism sits the material costs of a geopolitical intent of securing rare earth minerals, of which Africa has an estimated 30 per cent of the global market.

The World-Building of the AI Archive

The eventual aim of Big Tech companies is to reduce the need for digital labour by teaching algorithms to identify violent material, along with every object in the world, and self-label it, removing the interpretative role of human annotation. The current annotative labour force is thus considered ephemeral by tech companies despite the promises Sama makes via its webpages of enabling prosperous careers in Africa's burgeoning digital economies. Human labour offers a temporary salve to the problem of interpreting and settling meaning in the world, while designers and developers extend the agentic capacities of AI to learn autonomously what an object is and where and when it appears (i.e. an episteme). In pursuing this endgame to diminish human labour, designers and developers rely on the fiction that we can trust in the indifference of the machine to objectively settle meaning in the matrix worlds of AI. Yet, settling meaning is not what propels AI. Meaning is constantly being unearthed, turned over, pushed up and down to advance AI's capacity to learn and increase its commercial value.

In the development of LLMs, parameters are established to interpret the world in ways that rely on the history of written language, cultural signification and symbolism (thus, its globalism is organised through distinct ethno-geographies of imagination and production). The more information about an object that an LLM receives, the more it can load the representation of that object with data – digital signatures that enable it to be known. The LLM learns through the repetition of the object's appearance, developing a vocabulary-to-hand that identifies patterns and calculates predictive behaviour. LLMs build up an epistemology: a database of what, for example, a beheading – to recall Motaung's task – looks like and what it is, adding signatures to the content so that when presented with a corresponding image or video, the machine can label and annotate it in ways that are determined as correct through the self-referential checking of the machine.

In this approach, the meaning of reality becomes resource ready and objects in the world develop a new aesthetic of AI by becoming what we might call *thick data*, carrying a dense range of signatures that the machine

can recognise, communicate and calculate. Povinelli (2011) applies the term ‘cruel recognition’ to how and what Indigenous knowledge becomes known within dominant epistemic regimes, indicating that there is no a priori position in which reality is not known in some way and that interpretation is a political act that involves applying value. To thicken information with digital signatures is not simply about machine learning recognising and regenerating a given reality, like a fabric overlay where the world beneath remains intact; thick data constitutes the ordering of reality. It involves the thickening of reality with computational functions and signatures, which in the first instance involves setting parameters around what can be captured and read as a real object. As Jill Lepore (2023) writes in *The New Yorker*, ‘the data delusion’ is the assumption that everything can be translated into data and that data is a universal epistemology (see Mavhunga 2017 for studies in what science and technology look like from Africa).

Moving away from Kenyan digital workers’ distress at annotating horrifically violent scenes, the exclusion of the majority of African languages provides an equally good example of the world-building effects of AI. African languages make up nearly 30 per cent of the 7,000 languages that exist globally, yet they represent only a small percentage, around 5 per cent, of languages that are supported by LLMs. Modelled in a monolingual architecture, dominated by English (the dominant language of Silicon Valley), LLMs support three language scripts – Latin, Arabic and Ge’ez – which extend to only 42 African languages and present computational challenges in developing more linguistically diverse LLMs. Most African languages are classified as low resource, requiring considerable computing power to translate them into the LLMs used in AI: to make a language conversant with the dominant language scripts that LLMs have been built on requires the language and its cultural ecology to be configured within those scripts; a language cannot stand alone but is rendered anomalous to the established norm of the LLM, and its difference and non-computability become markers in the translation. The African languages that have been used in LLMs have been chosen because they have digital presence, large geographical coverage and representation in multilingual contexts; and these languages provide more commercial avenues for AI and digital services and products to expand (Vayani et al. 2025).

In translating African languages into the parameters of LLMs, the Bible is used as the baseline interpretive text. The Bible provides an original translation of the many languages encountered by missionaries (and classified by them as languages rather than dialects) and was used as a tool of colonialism, exerting moral authority and monoculturalism over vast populations in

making the colonial world and subjects legible. As Ernest Cole reflected in a photograph included in his book *House of Bondage*, Piet Mokoena, a Black South African man sent to the Banishment Huts of the Apartheid era, is pictured asleep with a Bible resting on his face: Africans say, 'When Europeans came, they had the Bible, and we had the land. Now we have the Bible, and they have our land' (Cole 1967: 191). The Bible is resurrected in AI as an imperial tool to set the baseline linguistic parameters of Natural Language Processing (NLP) that feed LLMs. In preparing language for computation, Kerry Holden, Matthew Harsh and Ravtosh Bal (2023: 8) critique how abstraction and separability negate the relational geographies of languages: 'NLP effectively flatten[s] languages ... to focus on learning and acquisition, etymology, and linguistic comparison across texts; the intricate political histories through which languages change are lost in the standardizing practices of NLP.' Across Africa, peoples and communities practice multilingualism, switching with ease between languages and dialects as they enter the different spaces of family and friendship networks, church, work, market, community, school, hospital and so on. Multilingualism, and the chrono-geographies of linguistic intermingling (understood as a historical linguistic geography of colonialism), remains an absent dimension in the construction of LLMs, which treats languages as siloed and flat. The imperial imperative to assert control and proprietorship over meaning by designating exclusive linguistic geographies continues as a colonial afterlife in the programming of LLMs, which prepare languages for computation based on their historical relation to dominant systems of signification while suppressing the relational geographies of how they are lived.

The existential urgency of AI worlds reproducing the dominant planetary structures of white supremacy, and it forming the normative structure of AI, is what Ramon Amaro (2022: 13) responds to when he writes: 'The evolution of machine learning is in fact conditioned by a set of atmospheric conditions that have attempted to organize both humans and technical objects around assumptions of race.' In machine learning, he argues, race is subtended as a technical object, becoming readable through classificatory systems of white heteronormativity that form the ontological parameters of machine learning. Race is data only insofar that its parameters are formed and written into code through the history of scientific racism, colonialism and slavery. Race is established as a *category* of being in the white world of AI, reasserting W. E. B. Du Bois's (1920: 30) sardonic proclamation: 'But what on earth is whiteness that one should so desire it? Then always, somehow, some way, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that whiteness is the ownership of the earth

forever and ever, Amen!’ Following Du Bois (1920) and Fanon ([1952] 2008), Amaro points to how AI is the reconstitution of the abyss in which Black being cannot exist – one can only find one’s whiteness in the calculative cartographies of machine learning.

There are still plenty of examples of glitches, Amaro argues, where AI wrongly identifies an object. The solution to this has been for AI designers and developers to focus on including more diverse data sets, on the pedagogical assumption that more data teaches the machine to correct its (racist) vision – assuming that a corrective version of reality is a computational dream. Amaro refers to Joy Buolamwini’s (2023) search for algorithmic justice in response to the failures of facial recognition technology to identify Black facial features. The reason why Black features are not recognised is because the computing was developed using predominantly white, male facial features as the prototype for all faces – the logic being Platonic in the search for ideal, universal forms (a face is a face, yes?) To include more diverse faces in the data sets, argues Amaro (2022), means identifying people of colour as anomalous outside the norms of facial recognition. This process of widening data sets leads to the capture, identification and analysis of Black being within the computational architectures of white patriarchal worlds. These are acts of surveillance that replicate the capture and incarceration of people of colour through slavery and colonialism, reproducing ‘scenes of subjection’ (Hartman 1997) and violence in establishing the white supremacy of AI (Browne 2015).

For Amaro, there is an emancipatory outlet in not being recognised – a freedom and autonomy to be enjoyed from not being reified as an object within the realms of AI and the white-world ownership that it craves. The emancipatory meaning of non-recognition is, as Hartman (1997: 117) argues, produced through a double bind of being free:

I have opted to characterize the nascent individualism of emancipation as ‘burdened individuality’ in order to underline the double bind of freedom: being freed from slavery and free of resources, emancipated and subordinated, self-possessed and indebted, equal and inferior, liberated and encumbered, sovereign and dominated, citizen and subject.

What is the value of not being recognised and calculated within the matrices of machine learning? What does exclusion mean and lead to? Does it mean being pushed underground to toil away at making meaning while the fabric of AI engulfs the surrounding world, producing new epistemologies, environmental relations and subjective conditions that refuse

the contract of consent. How can subjects and communities, environments and objects know, resist and even reconstitute calculation in the memory of AI and take control of it? Much like Hartman's (2019) critical fabulation of archival stories, how can memory be mastered from someplace else? We call this system of world-building the AI archive because it is an earth memory that is being formed in the image of white heteronormative patriarchy and the desire for control.

The AI archive reinvents the African continent along the nostalgic epistemologies of colonial science that are exercised with whimsy and aggression in pursuing the constant gratification of modernisation (see also Tilley 2011). Since colonialism and slavery, argues Mudimbe (1988), Africa has been imagined as existing in an embryonic state, representing both the origins of humanity and a time when the temporal and spatial orders of modernity had not yet been birthed. In this embryonic state, the continent appears empty and open to colonial powers writing its history and future. The chronopolitics of this invented Africa serve to empty out the present time by relegating it to another form of technological development. These imaginaries of regressive subjugation on account of 'progressive' possibilities find renewed significance in the contemporary discourses of AI in Africa. They are drafted into the cartographies of Africa's digital transformation that progresses at the continental scale, plotting the course to future horizons that override the granularity of geographical and cultural diversity. Discursively, the data dreams of Africa reach deep into colonial science and history to imagine the continent readied again for knowledge and the extraction of data and mineral wealth. The continent is reinvented as a geography of speculative dreams that heave open the portals of extraction, displacement and exploitation in the material relations of trying to make those dreams become reality. The ecologies of data centres are imagined in generic terms rather than understood as place-based interventions in existing environments scarred by the environmental afterlives of racial apartheid.

The AI Archive and Speculative Imagining

AI is not a conventional archive, collecting and collating documents and materials that bear significance – to national history and identity, for example – and housing them in established libraries, stacks and bureaucratic institutions. Thinking about AI as an archive irks somewhat because it recalls a seemingly analogue method of using class, status and power to structure

the ordering of historicity and its social remembrance. For Big Tech, AI and data are championed as the great levellers of information and knowledge. This is exemplified by Elon Musk's declaration when his company bought Twitter that the platform represented the world's digital town square for free speech, with Musk himself declaring that he is a free speech absolutist whose platform, renamed X, should operate free from moderation. The conventional function of an archive to reflect social value and structure supposedly dissolves in the age of digital media, where every memory, piece of information, opinion and perspective, and image captured can be stored equally in a vast planetary infrastructure of communicative data centres, flashing and bleeping more like fever dreams than the indexed records of the powerful and their institutions (Derrida and Prenowitz 1995).

While this show of faith in the democratising power of AI is performative and legally contentious, the organising logics of AI are often not scrutinised beyond an acknowledgement of algorithmic bias and some troubling of the geographical concentration of power in the hands of a few, mainly white, men with an affinity for science fiction, white supremacy and authoritarianism (Carroll 2024). The leaders of Big Tech are openly contemptuous about being subject to democratic forms of accountability over their data protection and privacy policies, algorithmic bias and business models.¹

Given the material conditions of data infrastructures and the autocratic leanings of technology leaders, it is perhaps unsurprising that algorithms energise around racist, violent misogyny and extremist content, feasting on vitriol to attract advertisers and endow those at the top of the Ponzi scheme with extreme wealth. The learning algorithms of AI bots, from Microsoft's Tay to X's Grok, have acquired and generated extremist, abusive and hateful speech and images. Such 'deviancy,' argues Louise Amoore (2020), is often dealt with as a single-case anomaly of an algorithm gone mad and behaving irrationally, rather than the structural effect of a regulatory platform. For

¹ Investigative journalism has challenged the ethics and legality of the technology industry, especially in relation to key concerns around privacy, online abuse, misinformation and algorithmic bias and harm. For example, the reporting of Carole Cadwalladr in *The Observer* newspaper exposed the Cambridge Analytica scandal (2018). See the collection of reports on holding Facebook (and parent company Meta) to account in *The Observer's* Cambridge Analytica Files, available at www.theguardian.com/news/series/cambridge-analytica-files (accessed 30 June 2025).

Amoore, the ethics of algorithms mark cultural boundaries of order and reason, and equate irrationality with evil doing, mirroring the prescriptions of Judeo-Christian morality in identifying and containing madness as an aberration from established norms of conduct, rather than understanding it as a structural faultline of the AI archive (see Foucault 1971).

The search for an encoded ethics for algorithms has tended to annex madness as an aberration that must be subjected to correction. In annexing the madness of algorithms as irrational aberration and departure from reason, such public interventions sustain the promise that algorithms could be rendered governable by appropriate thresholds of reasonable and unreasonable actions. (Amoore 2020: 109)

Efforts to contain the ‘madness’ of algorithms assumes or speculates that behaving reasonably is the proper ethical conduct that will find equilibrium in the future manifestations of AI. The corrective treatment for deviant algorithms centres on disciplining the technology, which involves rewriting code and realigning learning models to assuage moral panic and regain public faith and trust in algorithmic predictions. This ethical posturing ignores how dualistic styles of thought – of rational versus irrational, good versus bad, sane versus mad – are co-produced within the technology cultures of Silicon Valley, as the concentrated geography that next to Chinese competitors, leads AI globally. The Baconian ideal of a Promethean technology capable of restoring Eden infuses the technology myths of Silicon Valley (found in the manifestos and speeches of leaders and companies, the ‘digital town square’ presenting an example) (see Carroll 2024; Hughes 2004). Within these mythologies, technologies intrinsically embody a puritanical ethos to self-regulate behaviour by distinguishing good, orderly conduct from bad, disruptive functioning. This ideal image of autonomous technology is often used rhetorically by Big Tech leaders to keep at bay the accountability mechanisms of governing bodies, aspiring, at least in the face of political scrutiny, to Silicon Valley hosting the ‘culture of no culture’ whereby an apolitical neutrality is aspired to as the best environment for the technology to develop free from the contaminating influence of culture (as noted by Traweek 1992 in her study of high-energy physicists).

Treating bad algorithms as deviant entities shifts attention onto code and away from the cultural logics through which norms around behaviour are established and draw power. As Amoore (2020: 109–110) argues, ‘this common notion of the madness of algorithms as aberration has crucially overlooked the extent to which the rationality of algorithms is built on – indeed positively

embraces and harnesses – the power of unreason.’ The mathematical logic of machine learning feasts at the boundaries of order/disorder, delineating and co-producing dualisms in the design and running of algorithms. Feeding LLMs with more data lengthens the borders between rationality and irrationality, order and disorder, good conduct and bad, which is where Big Tech accumulates its wealth. The AI archive reproduces the discursive tensions inherited from Enlightenment philosophy in establishing universal norms of behaviour and conduct through the constitution of the *other* in relation to the speculative world orders of AI owners and leaders, which demonstrably seek to establish white, heteropatriarchal, capitalism as the norm – all the traits that Donna Haraway (1991) argued were characteristic of the information technologies in the Reagan era have coalesced in the era of AI with the added authoritarianism of wielding a technology that is infiltrating and shaping all aspects of life.

At the close of 2025, users of X discovered that its AI function, named Grok, could manipulate images of people by removing their clothes and picturing them nude or in a skimpy bikini (Gentleman and Horton 2025). Immediately, this function was directed at women and girls, underscoring the gender-based violence of the medium. Scores of women around the world woke up to see images of themselves in states of undress and in compromising sexual positions, which escalated to become more and more extreme. X has faced outrage from users and legal threats from governments to correct the ethical programming of the algorithm. The immediate response from Musk, the owner of X, was to condemn governments for restricting free speech and claim that Grok does not require moderation (Roose and Newton 2025). Misogyny and the dreams of sexual violence against women and children are a case of free speech, according to Musk, who uses his influence to polemicise the moral outcry of violating the privacy (of women and girls) versus the freedom of users to prompt Grok to do what they desire (‘put in a bikini’ started as a trend at the end of 2025 that quickly went viral, becoming one of the most common prompts). Emerging out of the controversy are claims about how, in the future, AI should behave and how algorithms should be written to preserve the privacy and integrity of the individual liberal subject. Musk believes that the preservation of the liberal subject is in the freedom of speech (or in this case, the freedom to abuse, manipulate and disinform) that *he* lends to users of the X platform. Musk is not advocating for the reification of the liberal subject through the representative functions of a democratic state and its laws. It is the spectre of freedom wilfully conjured by a corporate leader to puppet his imperialist ambitions. Away from the ethical debate,

controversy surrounding AI bots behaving badly is economically propitious, spiking interest and generating traction on the platform and servicing the business algorithms that calculate profit. Grok's libidinal and violent white supremacist programming makes Musk money, so why resolve the problem by building better algorithms when misogyny and gender-based violence drive the business model?

Grok demonstrates how Big Tech has structured AI to profit from the continual surfacing and depletion of order and disorder. This is the Ponzi pyramid of the data mine, the crucible of contemporary racial capitalism because the ideological norms of white supremacy and heteropatriarchal capitalism condition the environment of AI, where everything else is read as an aberration through the matrices of LLMs and, as such, a source of friction that propels the economic growth of AI.

For Amaro (2022), the AI archive represents a white world that becomes the measure of everything that is read as data. Black being is contoured as a technical object in machine learning that can only be interpreted and calculated in relationship to the historical legacies of white supremacy. Black being, argues Amaro, can thus never be established autonomously in machine learning and AI, and thus emancipation is found in being outside the machine and being illegible. Existing outside the machine, however, is a precarious place that faces the double bind of freedom: of being free but also alienated and excluded, as Hartman argues. Existing outside also faces the prospect of being marked without subjectivity (resource light, in the language of machine learning) and irrational (illegible and non-computational), unready to fulfil the unquenchable thirst of algorithms to generate wealth from the friction of reordering and rewriting the world.

To return to the annotative workers in Kenya who form the ghost labour of AI and are poorly paid to label horrific content so that the machine learns to erase it from the screens of users based predominantly in the wealthier markets of the world. The value these annotative workers produce is not in the clean content that users see, so that they do not see trauma and horror reflected in their social media algorithms; the value is in the mining, the digging out, sorting and labelling of ever more data to fill up and read the world within the linguistic parameters of LLMs. But like the diamond Ponzi, violence is the point on which value is realised. The pinnacle of 'clean' data for Western audiences is inverted into its shadow economies in the immediate uptake of AI image generation to sexually abuse, torture and 'punish' women and girls. To accomplish this sorting and labelling involves the continual extraction of data at the boundaries of disorder, prescribed by Big Tech, to spin the fiction

of bringing real-world objects into the light of legibility. In making the world, essentially making an ontology, the imaginative power of machine learning draws on the power of disorder.

The AI archive is not concerned with levelling information and knowledge; settling meaning is not its goal. AI is driven by a spectacle of the future that surfaces from the sublation of its own conditions of production (Gabrys 2011). Creating discord is part of its system of signification and the great catalyst of its Ponzi pyramid of inflated wealth and power of imagination. These structural faultlines of AI map into a material geography that must absorb the extreme energy and water usage of data infrastructures to support the rapacious computational capacities of AI.

The Shadow Materialities of AI

AI emerges from geosocial-technical assemblages that span vast spatio-temporal horizons of materiality, the economy, finance, natural resource, labour, infrastructure and computation, in addition to psychology, politics, law and bureaucracy. The complex entanglements of AI are in no way represented in its future imaginaries that are ideologically infused with techno-utopian ideals of efficiency, speed and economic growth. We might compare this separation between form and function, colonial dream and sublimated violence to De Beers' consolidation of the diamond mines which, in establishing monopoly control over the diamond trade, settled the value and aesthetics of the stone on international markets while alienating the conditions of its production into a *jouissance* of violence. The enormous wealth accumulated by Rhodes allowed him to finance his political aspirations in colonising southern Africa (and enabled him to leverage finance to fund his dream to establish Africa as a white continent by building the red line of infrastructure). The spectacle of AI is furnished by the semiotics of post-political utopian futures and technoliberal capitalism of Silicon Valley found in the thick of promotional materials, webpages, TEDTalks, product launch events and reports. These are powerful representations because they encode AI with an aesthetic that is recognisable across geographies as the conduct of the future, full of high shine and smooth surfaces, rational and ethical technologies untroubled by its own socio-technical composition and (in)stable ecologies. It is the aesthetics of AI that key stakeholders and actors such as governments, institutions and industry respond to through investment and infrastructure, inflating

the Ponzi pyramid, which in more recent discourse has threatened to burst and deflate the financial value.² Just as the value of the diamond was settled through the monopolistic control of diamond mining, the value of AI in Africa is settled through the surface aesthetics of future imaginaries through which the continent is reinvented and the materialities and violence of making and doing AI are sublated.³

Pipe Dreams

In 2024, Google announced a new fibre-optic pipeline that, starting in Kenya, will connect east and southern Africa to the rest of the world via Perth, Australia. The Umoja pipeline, meaning ‘unity’ in Swahili, was announced with much fanfare about the promise of economic, business, educational and security opportunities that would be catalysed by the new superfast digital infrastructures cutting through the interior of the continent. There are currently 77 undersea fibre-optic cables that plug into key ports stationed along Africa’s vast coastline and connect to the rest of the world. They plug into and operate through the trading and communication infrastructures established during colonialism that are still operational today, thus belying the dominant myth of the disconnected continent that inflates the data dreams of African AI futures. This reliance on imperial infrastructures, and the denial of Africa’s historical connection to the world, shifts the question towards understanding what function this myth of the disconnected continent serves in promoting global technology imaginaries.

Once plugged in, these fibre-optic cables trigger the branching out of internal pipelines. Most are privately financed and owned through networks of global capital that facilitate the communication networks considered vital to African economies making the leap to the Fourth Industrial

² To welcome in the new year in 2026, the national press reported on the anticipated collapse of the AI bubble. Writing in the *Financial Times*, Plender (2026) notes: ‘But artificial intelligence euphoria is rampant, crypto lunacy is rife, credit is bubbling in private markets and the US is once again at the heart of a global fiscal and financial maelstrom. Close to a hundred years on, we have to ask: does another 1929 crash loom?’

³ For the context of speculative imaginaries and whiteness, see Carroll (2024).

Revolution (Africa Union 2024).⁴ In a renarration of colonial imaginaries, pipelines serve as conduits to Africa's hidden extractive wealth in big data and the key to its future economic power. The expansion of data infrastructures, which includes building data centres, is furnished by what Laura Bear (2020) calls 'technologies of the imagination' that in the form of conference, publicity and policy materials, and imagery project the future promises of wealth and prosperity upon a newly technologised and digitally connected continent. The imagery of technologised Africa features common tropes of visualising the continent silhouetted and gridded by luminous lines suggestive of deterritorialised data. These tropes are reminiscent of the early geographical surveys such as Lord Hailey's 1938 *Africa Survey*, which was compiled to identify problems of development across Sub-Saharan Africa, the geography of which was mapped according to the straight lines of national borders artificially imposed through the colonial administration of European powers following the Berlin conference of 1884 (see Tilley 2011). The recognisable shape of the continent in triangular form, pictured in silhouette against the luminosity of digital infrastructures, also plays into the signification of time encapsulated in the symbolism of the 'dark continent' waiting to emerge from the shadows of world history (Mudimbe 1988). In this ideology of a nascent continent, Africa is continually readied, through the waves of interventionist development strategy, to make the redemptive historical shift to modernity (Mbembe 2001; Wynter 1996). The plugging in of undersea fibre-optic pipelines at key ports, while promoted via Google's own webpages as a technological spectacle, redeploys these metaphors to engender the perspectivist view of Africa. This is a view from the plateaus of data efficiency that stakes a strong foundation in the African earth and peers into the deep time of the continent to chart the course to its future technoliberal horizons.

⁴ It is difficult to calculate the exact number, financing and ownership patterns of internal pipelines branching off undersea cables, but dominant partners such as African Data Centres are owned by private technology companies such as Cassava Technologies based in South Africa. Large-scale data infrastructures are funded through coalitions of global finance, state actors and construction partners. Gagliardone (2019) charts the impact of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative across Africa, showing how Chinese interests and investment have structured the economy of the internet in African societies.

Red Lines and Pipelines

Umoja joins Google's other privately owned Equiano undersea fibre-optic pipeline that connects west Africa to Europe. Both pipelines appropriate African language and history in their naming and publicity, and geographically, they retrace routes through and around the African continent taken by colonialists and slave traders. The Equiano pipeline is named after the writer and leader of the abolitionist movement in the UK, Olaudah Equiano (2001), who was enslaved as a child and later bought his freedom and travelled the world, including to the Arctic, before settling in London. The Equiano pipeline retraces the maritime route of the Atlantic slave trade starting in Lisbon and skirting the west African coast before docking at Lagos, denying Equiano's freedom geographies and sedimenting his enslavement.

To further illustrate the colonial geographies of contemporary data infrastructures, Figures 5.3 and 5.4 sit side by side showing the route of the Umoja pipeline as it cuts through east and southern Africa, shooting out from KuGompo City in South Africa across the Indian Ocean floor to the Australian city of Perth (deemed part of the connected world). In parallel is the British South Africa Company (BSAC) exhibition poster from the 1936 Empire Exhibition held in Johannesburg, which highlights the

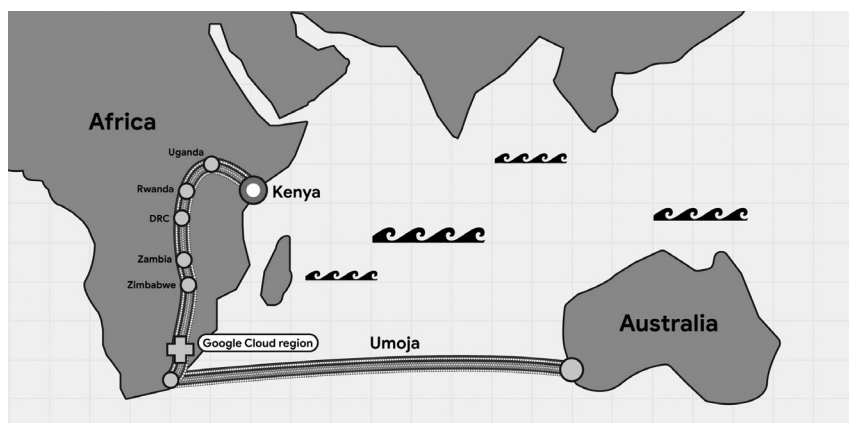


Figure 5.3

Map of the Umoja Pipeline. Source: Google blog, 'Improving Connectivity and Accelerating Economic Growth Across Africa with New Investments', Google LLC, 2024, available from <https://cloud.google.com/blog/products/infrastructure/investing-in-connectivity-and-growth-for-africa> (accessed 30 June 2025).

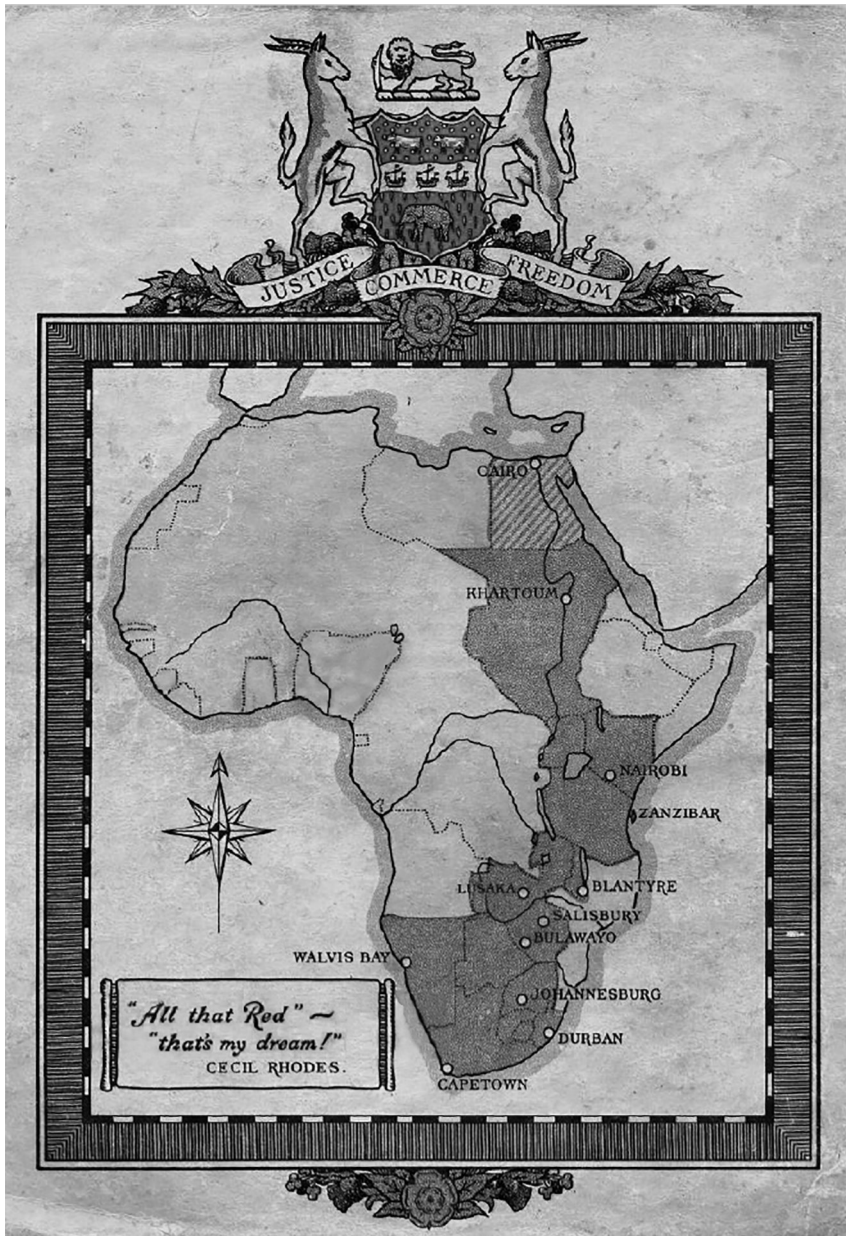


Figure 5.4

The 'red line' of infrastructure with the caption that it represents Rhodes's dream. Taken from a poster advertising the British South Africa Company exhibited at the *Empire Exhibition*, Johannesburg, 1936–1937: 'The Story of Rhodesia Told in a Series of Historical Pictures', 1936. Source: <https://bsac.greatnorthroad.org/bsac.pdf> (accessed 9 March 2026).

'red line' of infrastructure that Rhodes made claim to and stated was his dream: 'All that red, that's my dream' reads the caption (see also Chapter 4, 'Red Lines, White Spots'). The quote manifests Rhodes's desire, and celebrates his individual intention, to own and control the column of land stretching from the Western Cape to Cairo and to connect to the trading gateway of the Mediterranean Sea. The two cartographies, produced some 78 years apart, connect red lines and pipelines through the same colonial imperatives of turning all that is speculative and imaginary into reality and thus, as noted in the introduction, inverting Marx's maxim on the ephemerality of modernity that 'all that is solid melts into air' ([1848] 1967: 83). To say that all that is imaginary is made material involves geophysical changes of state, transforming African earths (extraction, privatisation, occupation) and the management of peoples (forced displacement and internment) in the service of racial capitalism that continues to structure the present data infrastructures as an afterlife of colonialism.

While the red line was never built, it was envisioned to capture a column of land stretching the length of Africa, maximise its 'raw' potential for wealth accumulation and incorporate it into white settler society while maintaining the aesthetic that these processes of colonisation were natural, seamless and moral. As discussed in the previous chapter, farms, mines, railways and telegram poles constituted the material scaffolding of the red line clambering up towards the mouth of the Nile as the BSAC exercised its royal charter for imperial colonisation by displacing communities and assigning interned and indentured labour to lay the railways tracks and erect the telegram poles. Along the line, white spots were projected to fan out from infrastructural junctures, while, as Cole notes in *House of Bondage* (1967: 64), black spots represented the Indigenous townships and villages targeted for displacement in establishing the dream as a reality.

In promoting its pipelines, Google conjures similar dreams of capturing the continent to service a global technoliberal imaginary and its wealth ambitions (Gabrys 2011: 58, 143). Google is not alone in this endeavour. Most global technology companies have staked a claim in Africa's technological future, building data centres, information and communication infrastructure and establishing hubs and labs as centres of the imagination and calculation. Contemporary narratives of 'Africa Rising' recapitulated by governments, industry and multilateral agencies reimagine the subterranean continent lifted out of poverty through the combined power of data infrastructures and entrepreneurial bridges (*The Economist* 2011, Perry 2012), along which young university graduates pass to be trained in the Global North and then return

to their home country to build the infrastructure.⁵ This is branded as a particular kind of West Coast American entrepreneurial identity that Saxenian, back in 1996, distinguished as inheriting ideas about Manifest Destiny and the American Wild West by embracing mantras such as ‘move fast and break stuff’, resisting regulatory governance and prioritising economic growth; and, in the pursuit of commercial gains, treating AI as experimental in the configuration and calculation of social, political and economic problems.

AI and digital services are supported by data centres, where computation and storage happen, and information communication infrastructure made up of pipelines, servers and satellites that criss-cross the earth’s surface and spin around the earth’s orbit. There are approximately 12,000 data centres currently operational across the world and this number is set to grow, increasing both the geographical density and specialisation of data centres and their reliance on the water–energy nexus (Yañez-Barnuevo 2025). According to the International Energy Authority (IEA) base report on AI energy use, data centres currently consume 1.5 per cent of the world’s energy, a percentage that is set to double by 2030.

Today, electricity consumption from data centres is estimated to amount to around 415 terawatt hours (TWh), or about 1.5% of global electricity consumption in 2024. It has grown at 12% per year over the last five years. ... global electricity consumption for data centres is projected to double to reach around 945 TWh by 2030 in the Base Case, representing just under 3% of total global electricity consumption in 2030. (IEA 2025: 49)

In the geography of data centres in Africa,⁶ South Africa has by far the largest number, currently housing 56 out of 233 (the second largest is Kenya with 19, another former British colony where English is the official language). Most national governments and regional organisations in Africa have adopted regulation that designates data centres as critical infrastructure in delivering national strategies on AI. The Global AI Summit for Africa – held in Kigali, capital of Rwanda, in April 2025 – marked the launch of the Africa Declaration on Artificial Intelligence driven by the Africa Union and Smart Africa (a non-profit organisation that coordinates member states’ commitment to growing

⁵ An example is the Africa to Silicon Valley (A2SV) bridge, which aims at ‘empowering Africa’s brightest minds to become world class engineers and product creators shaping the continent’s digital futures’ (<https://a2sv.org/>, accessed 27 October 2025).

⁶ See www.datacentermap.com/africa/

African knowledge economies). The declaration was signed by 55 African states that assented to the transformative power of AI and agreed to work together to harness its socio-economic potential to lift the continent out of its designated undeveloped state. The African continent is configured again along a teleology of human development that, as Wynter (1996) argued, centres economic growth as the end goal against which behaviour and action are oriented. Wynter identified this teleology as containing a redemptive-development function that plotted Africa's past as an obstacle to be overcome and surpassed in stepping into the future.

The declaration, alongside the websites, imagery and policy reports on AI future trajectories (ADB 2025), conforms to Bear's (2020) description of technologies of the imagination; it hedges speculative futures of AI in Africa to accumulate investment, attract global capital, expertise and resources while translating the harms involved in building and operating data infrastructures into profit margins.⁷ The declaration contains no clauses about resolving the water and energy demands of building and running infrastructures; how access to mineral deposits will be managed; the designation of land use and protection of land rights in the extraction of rare earth minerals; employment rights and working conditions of annotative and digital labourers; and the effects the monolingual architectures of LLMs have on local languages and cultures.

In the imagined isostatic rebound that new data will perform, the actual earth is being depleted, from the water scarcity and energy consumption of thirsty data centres (Google records a 50 per cent increase in energy usage worldwide over the last six years) to the mining of rare earth minerals.⁸ In South Africa, the on-going water shortages and questions over water quality, alongside load shedding of electricity blackouts due to ageing coal infrastructures, are further exacerbating the material suck of the data portal. Yet,

⁷ Reports that speculate on the future promise of AI are produced at national levels. For example, all African nations have centred AI and data infrastructures in their national growth strategies, and non-profit, regional and continental organisations, such as Smart Africa, the Africa Union (2024) and the Africa Development Bank Group (2025), regularly publish growth trajectories and planning documents for sustaining AI ecologies (that include labour, trade, services and infrastructure).

⁸ Google's self-reported 50 per cent increase in energy use since 2019 is linked to the introduction of AI platforms to its basic functions (Google's 10th Environmental Report – Google 2024, 2025).

undergirding those dreams are the same earth relations that keep Africa open for extraction: geological surveillance and displacement, the creation of proprietary geographies for mining rare earth minerals and data that exclude local populations, and the exploitation of a migrant labour force in mines and data service centres.

The organisation of materiality and labour in the service of data dreams draws on already existing administrative architectures that have been developed and deployed historically through the formation of colonial and national governments. In the context of South Africa, the annexation and administration of the extractive industries in diamonds and gold mapped out the racist architecture of governance that defined 20th-century society and politics in South Africa. As Vismann (2008) illustrates, administration – the filing of paperwork – facilitates a transaction in meaning that, rather than trying to understand subjects and their environments, creates new socio-spatial orders of existence within the epistemic frames of administrative rule, providing the systems of signification that LLMs also tap into.

The Bureaucratic Tissue of the AI Archive

Bureaucracy and administrative systems play an important role in substantiating the classificatory architectures of the AI archive and in providing the connective tissue between the materiality and signification of race in the building of LLMs. In an article about the upcoming AI Empowered Summit in Cape Town, the *Daily Maverick*, South Africa's daily left-leaning newspaper, used an image – quite possibly generated using AI, such as DeepAI – to depict the future subject of AI. This subject is clearly a sentient being with an enlarged smooth grey orb for a head, a pink luminescent halo and no identifying features – just a reflective surface staring back at the reader (see Figure 5.5).

The lack of identifying details, such as a face, seems rather ill-fitting in the context of South Africa, which for over a century has augmented the technologies of identity to administrate the Department of Native Affairs and provide the bureaucratic architecture of the Apartheid state (Breckenridge 2014). The image represents the promise of de-historicising the brutal racially organised histories by denying the relevance of technologies of identity in the making of AI, such as the biometric databases through which access to state services is provided. The image re-enacts identity as the site of self-realisation: the shiny grey orb can reflect back whatever image, face or idea of personhood you want it to. In the context of Kenya, Lisa Poggiali (2017) and Nanjala Nyabola (2018)



Figure 5.5

Image of a figure with a shiny orb head and wearing a raincoat to advertise the AI Empowered summit held in Cape Town, 2025. Source: *Daily Maverick*, 10 July 2025, available from www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-07-10-ai-empowered-10-questions-with-director-manuela-dias-de-deus/ (accessed 9 March 2026).

have both examined how digital technologies are discursively positioned to bring about the imaginary of a post-tribal, post-racial state in meeting the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Nyabola shows how glossy images of new technologies adorn billboards, government reports and university buildings as signs of the future, where conflicts over tribal identity that have characterised the history of resistance in Kenyan cities are conceived as moving into the past, drifting further away from a present pivoted towards future unities. Gloss, shine and lacquered surfaces feature heavily in these technologies of the imagination.

The figure depicted in the *Daily Maverick* has the words 'AI empowered' running off its shoulder. This is not the figure that will mine the rare earth elements to build data infrastructures and devices. Nor is this the figure that will labour in the factories and data centres, building components and batteries and annotating data in the global production chains that criss-cross the world. Nor, is this the subject laying pipelines along the seabed and bricklaying data centres. This envisioned lone figure of AI has no identity and thus no memory and no need to remember itself, its environment or social relations in configuring its identity. This figure is empowered through blankness, through erasure and replacement of personhood, creativity, identity and subjectivity, as they engage in the feedback loops of informational exchange. The figure emerges as

universal or displaced, and by implication it serves as the white replacement for *othered* bodies, designed and contoured through the coding and programming of Silicon Valley computer engineers as seamlessly universal and uniform.

In the film *Diabolical Architectures of Colonialism* (Planetary Portals Collective 2023),⁹ a similar faceless figure under the pressure of erasure is depicted limping across a scorched landscape. The film takes its name from a reference by Anthony Trollope (1878: 177) who in his travelogues to South Africa in the 1870s described the Kimberley diamond fields as the product of a 'diabolically ingenious architect', framing the diamond fields as an inverted urbanism populated by 'black ants'. The disfigurement that causes the subject in the film to limp across this environment happens because of the dehumanising practices of the colonial-extraction complex in transforming earth relations into the resource of racial capitalism. The figure in the film is the subject of this transformation. Their subject position forms through the very technologies of identity that spatialised labour in the growth of extraction and imperial power, erasing ancestry, identity and lineage, and reanimating Black men (there was little will to know women in extractive labour regimes) as mine labour in the handwritten ciphers of ledgers, cash books, passes and registries of the mine (Kentrige and Morris 2021). The administrative systems that sought to make legible the movement of mine labour were modelled in South Africa on a one-to-many approach. These forms of paperwork did not ask if the person in front of a bureaucrat was who they said they were; instead, 'those systems answer the question, "Who is this?" And they have been specifically developed to strip [people] of any agency in answering the question' (Breckenridge 2014: 202). The administration involved in determining forms of life, relations and mobilities that were established to control and manage migrating populations of mainly male labourers (again, the women that cooked, cleaned and offered healing were not interesting in the schemes of legibility) aspired to attain national coverage and was developed beyond the remit of local government, parishes and civic institutions through which biometrics developed in other national contexts.

The South African state has served as a laboratory for this new form of biometric government and that the technologies that states across the world have been adopting over the last decade find their earliest and fullest development here. (Breckenridge 2014: 21)

⁹ <https://transmediale.de/en/event/planetary-portals> (accessed 19 June 2026).

While not always successful, as fingerprinting at scale is difficult to administrate, Keith Breckenridge (2014) shows how South Africa was unlike any other country in implementing biometric schemes to such pervasive extents. South Africa developed extensive data sets that represented the racist regimes of the Apartheid government in the spatial management of racialised subjects. In their analysis of classification, Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star (2000: 197–225) examine how race was enacted as a bureaucratic category in South Africa during Apartheid. They cite the famous example of bureaucrats measuring race by inserting a pencil into someone's hair. If the pencil stayed in place, the subject was designated Black; if it slipped out, the subject was designated white. What emerges is a flimsy process of racial classification, they argue, in which the convergence of race and bureaucracy produced authoritarianism where race becomes a substitute for nations. For Hannah Arendt (1966: 245), South Africa was the 'culture bed of imperialism' on account of the convergence of race and bureaucracy.

Two new devices for political organisation and rule over foreign peoples were discovered during the first decades of imperialism. One was race as a principle of the body politic, and the other bureaucracy as a principle of foreign domination. (Arendt 1966: 241)

Breckenridge warns against the introduction of AI, one that poses as a benign technology but utilises established data sets to further entrench the technologies of identification in South Africa. While he is concerned with documenting the history of biometrics in the administration of the South African state, he points towards more sinister uses in the present that, as Green (2020a) argues, maintain the agnology of environmental harms affecting marginalised communities; model and predict how people access and use state services; govern how borders are maintained; and determine labour distribution, to name a few of the bureaucratic practices that draw on technologies of identification.

Conclusion

The AI archive does the work of an imperial machine by regenerating memory where the act of forgetting propels the imaginaries of AI, alongside erasing environments of life that forego re-remembering (in Morrison's sense) the fraught histories of relation (which are relation nonetheless). In working against the AI archive, in the exhibition *I am in your dreams, but you are not in mine* (2025), we invite curiosity around questions that attend

to the sense-making, materiality and the hallucinatory dimensions of AI as part of the continuum of coloniality in producing the dream of white worlds through the erasure of other modes of existence, experience and knowledge. A critical intervention of AI is how, through machine learning and LLMs, the world is readied as an epistemology of data.¹⁰ AI does not simply represent the world in the sense of harnessing and annotating data that is then used to train algorithms; rather, reality is co-constituted through computational entanglements with a white, heteropatriarchal norm that reads against itself to define difference and, as Amaro (2022) argues, to use race as a social signifier to frame the existence and predict the futures of users and subjects. AI is a method of reading race and rendering it legible through epistemologies that are colonial, located in the plantation economies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the legacies of scientific racism. To build these imaginaries that promise freedom through utopia and inflict new forms of epistemic violence, AI relies on shadow geologies, economies and bureaucracies that are costing the earth as a habitable planet. The mineral, energy and water resources needed to maintain data infrastructures threaten to destroy environments and displace communities in water-scarce regions of the world, such as Sub-Saharan and southern Africa. The human labour required to train algorithms is exposed to exploitation and alienation at the command of Big Tech operating globally. Like the diamond, the economy of AI is propelled by fabulation and fabrication, by data dreams of speculative futures. The technology does not sit comfortably in fixed realities of the past and present. It is envisioned as a technology that has no present; it is made up of future (bad) dreams.

¹⁰ This is analysed as a political act of negotiating value and knowledge in strategic relationship to power; as Shapin and Schaffer (1985) argue, what we understand about the world is intimately tied to how we live it. For Barad (2007, 33) the universe does not simply just exist; it is divined and brought into zones of comprehension through infra-action. Barad's term, infra-action, differs from interaction in which actors engage with each other as separate entities. Infra-action infers that the entanglements of bodies, objects, environments and actions (methods) come into being through contact. Read in this way, science and technology are not already in existence in readying the world for representation and intervention but are brought into being through the intra-actions of assembled entities. Tsing's (2004) term for this generative moment is friction, and for Haraway (2003: 24) the 'the relation is the smallest unit of analysis' because it is the site of production in the making of new worlds.



Conclusion: Diamond Power!

This book came about through a series of conversations around the portal as a geographical concept to think through the planetary relations that shape the condition of environmental life and knowledge economies today; a way of understanding a contingent set of 'burrowings' through the earth that generates planetary conditions. As a material arrangement of time and space, and an incursion into that very same arrangement of geographies and environments, the book started with a series of questions: if colonialism stands in for a cacophony of planet-changing material practices that are based on extraction and generated through imperial invasion and settler integrations, how can these colonial architectures and infrastructures be mapped to open their structures to contestation? What reparative spatial models could analyse the weight of extraction across continents and through the medium of the earth, and the formation of unequal possibilities of subjective life? Coming together as geographers, we understand the need for a spatial-aesthetic theory that can account for both the enduring legacies of the material and imaginative arrangements of colonialism and the violent changes in state that they enact – changes of state that fracture forms of life and life–earth relations with an architecture of duration that can be understood as the social reproduction of colonial environmentalism. The colonial portal has never arrived at a decolonial moment in terms of the environment, despite extensive liberation struggles. Rather, the portals of colonial earths are an on-going site and structure of active decoloniality that require shredding, undergrounding, looping and dreaming in the reinvention of coloniality's extractive and exilic conditions, to imagine a relation to the earth *as* earth. The spatial durabilities of colonial epistemes have become clear to us within the context of the global 'rename and reclaim' movement which revealed that when statues come down (or do not come down, as in the case of the Rhodes statue at Oriel College in Oxford), an infrastructure of value regulation remains that continues to reinscribe space with its imaginaries and extractive demands. In response to the continuance of colonial value structures and dreams, this

book offers (and invites) an understanding of the portal as a *reparative theory* and a *methodology* for interrogating the legacies of the violence of colonial environmentalisms while also conceiving of new political and aesthetic geographies that invite scrutiny in the spatial and temporal logics of violent dreams.

If colonialism is an opening, a sick and extractive dream that surfaces, the portal is what keeps the dream open and active. As architectures and imaginaries feed the dream, the portal consolidates through its modes of valuation and modalities of mineralisation; it volumises itself as a planetary incursion. Throughout this book, we have shown an array of portals that enact changes of state in the material flows and environmental conditions that define the extractive context of planetary relation. While some portals are planetary, in so far that they change the geophysics of the planet (in terms of extractive colonial modalities that produced climate change), others are (more) localised as they take the form of resistances that open into different weathers of the imagination and grounded resolutions. We understand the planetary as a dimensional terrain that punctures and punctuates. In this understanding of the planetary, the portal is a zone of transformation and pressure that engenders geophysical changes of state, shifting the way spatial models are understood to a perspectival and material register that retools relations, sense-making, projection, psychosis and temporal experience. Through its *suck* and *swirl*, its *building* and *extension*, the portal organises time and space with varying degrees of intensity and moments of acceleration and slowing down, taking material form in concrete rearrangements of environments and geographies. Since Edward Said's (1978) powerful analysis of imagined geographies in the erasure of Palestine and Palestinians, the fabrication of imperial geographical visions has long assisted in impacting the fabric of everyday lives through the weaponisation of the earth. The linguistic and spatial coupling that Said analysed in the context of Palestine expounded upon the theoretical constellations that sustain the imaginary and the geopolitical actions as concomitant forces, which make its reality. The colonial planetary portal has a distinct geographical pull, from west to east and north to south, and from above to below. The propulsion of the portal turns land from a medium of identification to one of alienation, fracturing the polity that gathers in those relations through the earth and land into forms of attachment. Thus, reparative justice in geographical imaginaries operates as an epistemic and empirical proposition – that is, the ideation of an environment or world and the ability to impose that vision on the earth and secure its maintenance, or the organisation of a counter-cartography to that determination.

Mirroring the lonely hero Fred Daniels, the eponymous *Man Who Lived Underground* (referenced in the Introduction), who seeks reparative justice through the reconfiguration of elemental worlds, J. M. Coetzee's novel *The Life and Times of Michael K* introduces a similar kind of figure, Michael K, who at the margins of South African society wanders from the urban slums through the Karoo and into the low veld, finding his way off the grid by gently refusing to follow the conventional cartographic markers laid down by roads, fences, tracks and paths. His slow sliding off the cartographic map is both a literal refusal to make himself available to accountability within the frames of colonial cartography (i.e. Spivak's notion of a mappable and mapped world) and a metaphorical sliding off the grid of the Apartheid regime and South African society, offering instead himself to the landscape and earth he comes to inhabit (i.e. embodying Spivak's notion of planetary alterity). The metaphorical slippage plays out along his wandering through the landscape, where 'every mile or two there was a fence to remind him that he was a trespasser as well as a runaway' (Coetzee [1983] 2004: 97). Infrastructures of property transform him from a human to a 'trespasser', and within the authoritarian regime in which he exists, he is later captured and interned in a labour camp that lies 'out of sight of the town on a road that led nowhere else ... where people were deposited to be forgotten' ([1983] 2004: 94). Even when he is out of sight, he struggles to escape the logics of authoritarian capture.

But, he later escapes the camp and finds refuge in an abandoned house, where he crawls beneath the floorboards to hide from the men who occasionally drop by on their raids through the land (very much similar to Fred Daniels' existence within the shadowy interstices of modernity). It is here that he comes to the realisation that 'in times like these a man [or a woman] must be ready to live like a beast ... [he (or she)] cannot live in a house with lights in the windows. He [or she] must live in a hole and hide by day' ([1983] 2004: 99). Michael K proceeds to abandon the house, exploring the surrounding landscape for areas to make himself a place to live, and comes across a crevice that he modifies:

His first step was to hollow out the sides of the crevice till it was wider at the bottom than the top, and to flatten the gravel bed. The narrower end he blocked with a heap of stones. Then he laid the three fenceposts across the crevice, and upon them the iron sheet, with slabs of stone to hold it down. He now had a cave or burrow five feet deep. When he backed away towards the dam to inspect it, however, his eye at once picked out the dark hole of the entrance. (Coetzee [1983] 2004: 100)

By completely abandoning the architectural markers of modernity, he builds himself a cavernous habitat from the muddy soils of the veld. Hidden

within the landscape and earth his dwelling does not, like a hut, house or high-rise, sit on top of the ground, nor, like Daniels', lie below it, but instead finds its place somewhere in between, somewhere both above *and* below. As the narrator explains, 'He dropped to the Earth' ([1983] 2004: 107) to take up a position of spatial alterity, one that dematerialises his body and his existence, locating himself outside of mappable society and its systems of value. By dropping to the earth, literally, physically and metaphorically, he rematerialises himself to form a place of existing both within *and* outside – above *and* below – the colonial cartographies of capture. He occasionally finds himself under threat of discovery and capture, seeking protection in his cave:

He had seen a man on horseback heading towards the dam, and another man on foot beside him; he had also clearly seen the barrel of the gun poking over the horseman's shoulder. Like a worm he began to slither towards his hole, thinking only: let the darkness fall soon, let the Earth swallow me up and protect me. (Cotzee [1983] 2004: 107)

From the permissive dance circles formed by miners to Michael K's literal embrace of and becoming the earth, and from Fred Daniels' shadow spaces of subterranean tunnels to the shebeen queens who both procured and protected vulnerable life, the modification and modulation of earth into spaces of habitation are evidence of the experiments in living with and against, within and beyond, above and below the colonial systems of value and cartographies of capture. While the shebeen tavern, hut, cave or dance circle all provide worlds of alterity, none of them offer redemption or emancipation from the systems of oppression. When the premise of the freedom of life is only found in expulsion, where does this leave freedom dreams and spatial politics?

This book takes inspiration from this geographical problem of the *where* of geographical imaginations as a material-geophysical question. Throughout each chapter, we have enquired into the imperial archive, image and world to consider the following: What is the role of reparative geographies in a history of violent projections and soul-capturing imaginaries? How can new spatial propositions and imaginative apparatuses – like those created by Fred Daniels, Michael K, the shebeen queens and the numerous unnamed re/sisters that feature as silenced voices in the archives (like the 'woman in flux', discussed below) – deepen analysis of the continuities of affects and name the spatial dynamics of redress and restitution? How can speculative non-fictions rewrite the factual authority of the archive? And within the promise of redress, in the unequal ratios of racial torment and their corresponding weight of environmental degradation, what are the geophysical effects and psychic

affects of those imaginaries? Dreams carry a heavy burden when they are not your own. They grant the power to intervene in the landscape and to dictate the conditions of power that are actualised as geopolitics and economics, but felt as a wound. But dreams are also the site of alterity, of rearranging worlds in ways that enable the dreamer to lead a trajectory of living otherwise. Sometimes they are the only uncolonised space in which to stretch out. An earth-bound planetarity that thinks *with* the earth as a co-constitutive partner in the making of forms of life does not solely designate ends (anticipated or actual ecological ends) but depends on more liveable and differentiated openings. How might a portal be disassembled by something buried in the landscape, a song, a refusal, the way a shadow gives rise to a different schema of remembrance? Speak to me and let's see what happens, history might say; the route is not given by intention alone. Incidental marks tell us about different passages and how the body's exchange with external technologies of capture and bureaucratic material modes has been marked in certain ways through geological exchanges. In the remains, something remains.

In the initial stages of our research that formed the basis for this book, we encountered a series of images of which one, in particular, stood out. Or, to be more precise, we encountered a photograph in Rhodes' archive in which one figure stood out: a woman captured in flux. Photographed at the entrance to the Sheba Gold Mine, she is captured at a moment where she turns away from the photographer, creating friction in the background of the image (see Figure 6.1). With an affectual commitment to the 'woman in flux,' we recognise that her blur offers a different path, opens another door into the scene of the mine, another portal, which stands as both an active subject in and conscience to this work (while not overstating the gendered role of the burden of witnessing for others, nor of how the present makes use of the past for acts of redemption). The woman in flux sets the tone and breathes another kind of life into the archive in the overwhelming violence of its tenor and terror, as a figure of re-remembrance. She is caught turning away from the colonial camera. She creates an archive of the unnoticed, leaving a trace for the future of her simply being there and refusing the imposed dream, a portal of defiance through a posture of resistance in what Hartman (2018) calls a 'revolution in a minor key.' It is a photograph about patriarchal power, after all. A woman in the background is created as just that, background, invisible to the scopic regimes of patriarchy and power. To the photographer and the archivist, there was no will to know or even notice her, and thus no interest in writing her into 19th-century mining history, which the image lays testimony to in documenting Rhodes's dealings in South Africa. Her presence is



Figure 6.1

'Woman in flux' in Sheba Main Drive. Source: Photograph album purchased by the Bodleian at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. t. 59, page 3, no. 141.

an insistence that refuses the event surface of colonialism and suggests other dimensionalities and inner lives. She turns away ... from the scrutiny of the colonial gaze. She simply claims a life that is her own in that small act. She activates another story to be told, which we cannot know, only inasmuch as we know it is hers to tell and claimed as such (it is not ours). In that quiet act she poses other questions about shadow spaces, what is disregarded and overlooked, and of the right to self-representation and who has the capacity to imagine, to dream and capture. The colonial archive reeks with an unruly force of the 'repressed' – a reality of violence and subjugation that, as the woman in flux exemplifies, always reaches forward in time. This repression – of the woman in flux and the countless other souls that join her guard – is propelled by the psychosis of whiteness and power based on the inversion of what it really means to steal: as we argue in Chapter 1, 'Every Portal Is a Mine, Mine, Mine,' theft of Africa through colonialism is retold in the mine as Africans' theft of white man's property.

The idea of theft of land and Africans' right to African land returned to prominence mid-2025 with President Trump's (Elon Musk-inspired) inverted antics around 'white genocide' taking place in South Africa. This is a conspiracy repeated by Musk's Grok AI, in response to unrelated searches for information on scaffolding and basketball, alongside the promotion of other white supremacist figures as social theorists and academics. The pictures held up in Trump's bizarre show and tell of photocopied evidence to the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, were of the graves of Black Africans in Congo. Black bodies were once again used to underpin the material realities of the white psychosis of theft. The relation between the white supremacists of technology in the White House and South Africa (and its 'white genocide' call), steeped in racist 'great replacement' theory (another trope in the mobilisation of white vulnerability), has no small twist of irony about it when this is exactly what the history of white settlerism was attempting to enact in its acts of repopulation. While these are complicated relations that should not be simplified to fit a model of repetition and renewal, there are several things that can be observed in this historical geographical portal. First, Musk and Peter Thiel were made through the material spoils of the South African mine and its racial hierarchies of devaluation of Black life and the white spoils of neo-colonial wealth (Musk's family was in the mining business and Thiel's father worked in a uranium mine in Rössing, now in Namibia but formerly under the control of the South African administration during Apartheid and one of the longest and largest open pit mines in the world). The normalised racist hierarchies and spatialities that became Apartheid and were forged in the colonial mines informs the White House's widely reported rhetoric of white South Africans being described as 'victims of unjust racial discrimination' and offered asylum in the US. Such claims of racial discrimination reverberate in the context of systematic theft of land, displacement from ancestral pastures and confinement in 'reserves' and compounds through successive imperial wars and formalised in laws such as the Natives Land Act of 1913, which restricted Black South Africans to owning just 7 per cent of the land. According to a government audit from 2017, 72 per cent of the nation's private farmland is owned by white people today, who make up only 9 per cent of the population.

The patriarchs of technological empires, whose material wealth and environmental comforts were achieved through a white supremacist logic of above and below, actively campaign for the reallocation of victimhood to whiteness (see also Green 2020b). As a corollary and corrective force to the fantastical stories of white genocide, weNkosi's extraordinary book, *These Potatoes*

Look Like Humans, offers a counter-gaze, as he discusses how Black South Africans continue to resuture their relation to land in the on-going aftermath of contested land and laboured death through the burial of ancestors. In the racially oppressive dispossession of farm labour (which mirrored the convict lease in the mines), burying ancestors in the farms is part of establishing their own 'eschatological futures' (weNkosi 2023: 131). This tender improvisation with alienation and the burial of the dead in unowned land became a way to assert a longer continuance and relation with the land beyond its ownership by white farmers, and into the future. When considered through an 'eschatological gaze,' weNkosi (2023: 119) argues, the 'land itself is a spirit, and those working and living on the land are in conversation with that spirit.' As he continues:

That is why the land is our eschatological future; its past refers us back to our relationship with it, with ourselves and with others. Its future still refers us back to our anxieties in the past and the present. This spirit makes itself visible to the archaeologists who, in seeking to understand humanity by looking at different points in civilisation, return to land, go to graves, the caves, the rocks and the trees to see how humanity related to the land (informed by chronology and genealogy). (weNkosi 2023: 119; see also Adomako 2024; D'Avignon 2022)

weNkosi's eloquent argument is that while the possession of land came with the ownership of many souls, those souls could never be fully possessed or quieted in their claims. Reclamation of land and its ancestral relations was part of a relationship with reconstituting the role of the dead in ways that made counter-claims to the necropolitical intent of white farmers – which is to say that the spiritual claims to land are never quieted, and in these remains longer environmental histories are activated and renewed.

Yet, in our archival work, we questioned to what extent it is possible to find counter-cartographies within the portal, to take the violence and resistance that constitutes its architecture into another realm and force an opening. Or put differently, we questioned how the colonial portal (Equation 1) could be shredded, taken apart in the process of forming other portals of existence and possibilities for repair (Equation 2). The woman in flux does not belong to the now or the future, but she is there in the past insisting on something different. She lives in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, which holds the papers of Cecil Rhodes and therefore carries the heavy burden of his violent legacy. The woman in flux orientates and inspires thinking about the complicated practice of reading and thinking with small acts of resistance within the frame of colonial

photography and bureaucracy (see also Figures 3.1, 4.1 and 4.5). Rather than imagining outsiders the frame (or portal), she forces a consideration of difference emerging from within, but without restitution, similar to all the unnamed people that appear in photographs referred to throughout the book. As the psychologist, activist and writer Frantz Fanon (2004: 19–20) reminds us, ‘in the colonised world, the colonised’s affectivity is kept on edge like a running sore flinching from a caustic agent’. Similarly, the woman in flux’s affectivity punctures the photograph; it reaches out to create a dimensionality of resistant existence within and beyond the spatio-temporal confines of the frame.

In the photograph of the woman in flux (Figure 6.1), she appears among white mine owners who stand strident in the foreground by the entrance to the mine. The men stand for prosperity, patriarchy and white supremacy through material extraction. They pose in white flannels, their attire a testament to the fact that they will never go into the mine and dirty their whites but will profit from those that go underground and who will live with the underground in their lungs and bodies and intimacies. As the men brace for the camera’s capture to gather them with its long shutter speed, the woman’s turn thwarts the directionality offered by the photographic plane and thus resists its hold over her life and its representation. She is practising Black feminist fugitivity; she blurs the frame, drawing the eye to a space of difference. Whiteness stands for a new time in southern Africa, an opened portal at the entrance to subterranean hells, where the colonial clock turns minerality into European modernity. The woman in flux takes her time out of their equation; for a moment, she enacts the literal shredding of the planetary portal (see Equation 2), isolating, like Fred Daniels and Michael K, the material environment’s transformation by taking her power elsewhere into a different temporal frequency (Camp 2019). Simply put, she turns her back, momentarily, on the future offered. A refusal of colonial times, turning away, turning towards; these are options in tight margins – she catches time. In Tina Camp’s words, she is a still-moving image, claiming affects into another future and its possible care. Her flux orders a different occupation than the one set down at the scene of mine ownership over the property of the land and persons-as-labour-as-property-as-fungible energy. The ‘non-event’ of her blur questions the confident event of commemoration, its performance and patriarchy.

In many colonial photographs, the repetition of Black and Indigenous subjects turning away from the camera is a way of not consenting to be part of a colonial scene that was intent on their destruction. The long exposure times needed to capture an image on gelatin dry plates in the late 1800s meant up to a minute of stillness (depending on light conditions) was required to properly

capture a scene. Turning away, looking askew or moving towards and aside rendered the body in a blur and thus prevented a certain kind of possession. The theft and capture of Black subjects' environmental life and labour defined the mechanics of colonial extraction, so we can read these small acts of defiance, contingently, as a symbolic resistance to theft. The woman in flux performs a 'shadow geology': she punctures the portal of clean white extraction, posing haunting questions of the mine and its orders of value. She speaks to the transformations needed for a future yet to arrive, the still-not-arriving history of extraction that marks the present and inscribes its environments of memory. Like Fred Daniels in his reconfigured underground environment or Michael K and his alluvial hut, she has created a portal. She is restarting the clock on where theft begins and ends in refusing its script.

As her blur unsettles the colonial clock in its act of self-made disappearance, it prises open the temporal collapse of the photograph's testimony to write the history of (white) extraction with other questions about existence. In the barely noticeable scene of congratulatory extraction, she provides another way of seeing into the portal of mining subjects and land. She also asks ethical questions of geographers who might retrieve her for future storying of speculative non-fiction, when the very act of her agency is one of removal from the portal of extraction.

This book lays down the theoretical groundwork that enables the portal to be applied as an analytic for apprehending the reconfiguring of space and time through colonial afterlives and extractive logics, as evident in each of the portal-themed chapters. Because of our geography, this is a theory-oriented methodology, not one informed by experiential or emplaced knowledges that would undoubtedly narrate and orientate differently. In addition to the book, in early 2025 we tested and trialled the methodology through the production and display of a series of artworks at The Photographers' Gallery, London, in collaboration with the artist and poet, Michael Salu. The woman in flux appears as one of four photographs alongside the man in the landscape in Figure 4.1 and the photograph of the Kimberley Mine in Figure 1.5.¹ Under

¹ *I am in your dreams, but you are not in mine* was exhibited at The Photographers' Gallery from 7 March – 15 June 2025 and online: <https://unthinking.photography/projects/planetary-portals/woman-in-flux.html#pastoral-1> (accessed 9 March 2026).

the title *I am in your dreams, but you are not in mine*, the exhibition displayed four single-shot films that challenge the gaze offered in the photographs and their racialisation of South African environments. The films shake up colonial worldviews by introducing animations produced with generative AI. In its interpretation of de-colonial texts (speculative non-fiction written with archival images and themes from this book), the AI alters gendered and racial hierarchies in the images to reinforce white supremacist logics. The films expose how AI repeats the racial paradigms that defined extraction in the late 19th century, reproducing these logics in the present, even while ‘interpreting’ intentionally critical scripts.

As a contemporary comparison to the mining of minerals, generative AI relies on data that is mined to create large language models (LLMs). As discussed in Chapter 5, ‘Data Dreams,’ LLMs are fed primarily by English-language data, consigning local languages and knowledge to an unknown (and unknowable) place in the material manifest of what might be called the AI archive. Each of the films sort to establish connections between the mono-ocularism offered in the colonial gaze reproduced in each of the archival photographs and the monolingual reading of each photograph through the LLM. We intentionally selected photographs that show white subjects in a triumphalist mood, as they actively create a visible shadow or negative space of silenced trauma. For each photograph, we wrote a speculative non-fictional text that – similar to our reading of the woman in flux in Figure 6.1, the man in Figure 4.1 and the boxers and dancers in Figures 1.11 and 1.12 – speaks into the silent echoes of the photograph’s negative, shadow spaces. The text was fed into different LLMs with instructions to interpret and alter the ‘base photograph,’ providing the LLM with a puzzle that it attempted to solve with pattern recognition. When faced with queries that the LLMs do not immediately recognise – those missing from patterns typically traced in their training data – they hallucinate. Also known as ‘inferences,’ the LLMs’ hallucinations were used to illustrate the manipulative syntax of colonial photography: how landscapes and bodies are perceived and controlled through the photographic gaze, and which subsequently become replicated through LLMs’ syntheses. By adding the unedited outputs to each of the single-shot films, the resulting films reveal how the LLMs’ interpretation of the speculative fictional texts through their modulation of the base photographic resulted in a conflict: the LLMs both respond to the images’ burden of erasure but through repeating new erasures, they reveal how the LLMs’ visual ‘solutions’ are founded on historical racial logics of subjugation, erasure and expulsion

(see Figure 6.2). The output films present visual compositions that are counterintuitive, anti-aesthetic within the Western canon of visual culture and ways of seeing, drawing attention to invisibilities and unknown ways of seeing.

In addition to the base photograph and the animations produced using generative AI, a third layer is introduced across the films: manual animations that foreground the sensory poetics of landscapes, weather and bodily movements (see Figure 6.3). The animations reinscribe the images with sensations, emotions and human agency erased by colonial memory and therefore become evocative of the quiet work of resistance to the continuing colonial violence. The animations present and maintain resistant cultural imaginations that lie beyond and in opposition to imperial visions and extractive logics. The layering of animations across the colonial photographs provides a visual rescripting of the environment in ways that both expose the racist logics of colonial photography and AI while also questioning what kinds of knowledge and sensibilities lie outside this lineage of colonial capture.

The intention of re-reading colonial photographs and transforming them through speculative reinterpretation and transformation is to ask: What



Figure 6.2

Still from 'Woman in flux'. Single-channel video loop. Run time 07.39. © *Planetary Portals Collective*: Casper Laing Ebbensgaard, Kerry Holden, Michael Salu and Kathryn Yusoff. Source: Photograph album purchased by the Bodleian at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. t. 59, page 3, no. 141.

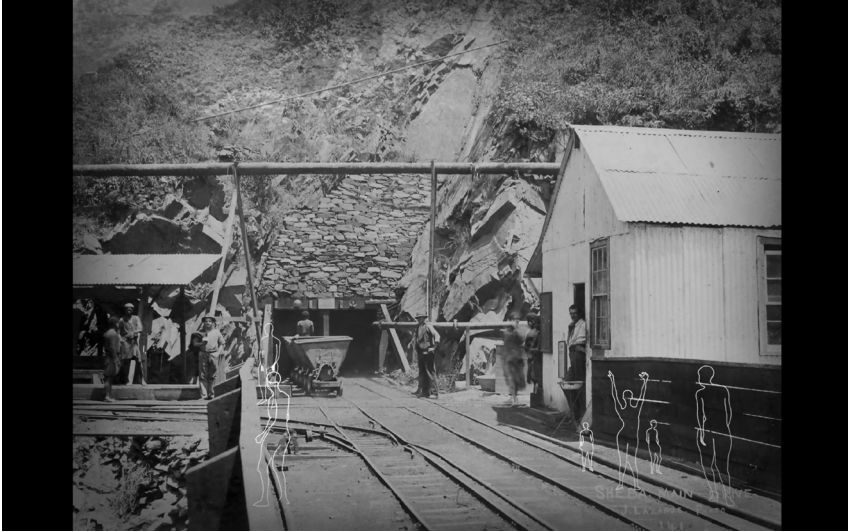


Figure 6.3

Still from 'Woman in flux.' Single-channel video loop. Run time 07.39. © *Planetary Portals Collective*: Casper Laing Ebbensgaard, Kerry Holden, Michael Salu and Kathryn Yusoff. Source: Photograph album purchased by the Bodleian at Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MSS. Afr. t. 59, page 3, no. 141.

other ways of sensing the landscape, inhabiting spaces and dreaming of worlds are we not allowed to feel, sense and see in these images and their AI-hallucinated reinterpretations? How might we consider AI as an archive and, if so, how does it remember and condition the material organisation of memory? In opening up the cartographies of aesthetic portals for explication, we sought to speak to the temporality of the AI archive and attend to, represent and enact non-linear temporalities that push back against the racist logics that AI seemingly reproduces in unfettered perpetuity.

Central to the process of making the films is the rescripting of each single-shot film through short scripts, providing the raw material for textual translation, animations and provocations for the LLMs. As LLMs are available to general audiences, they tend to encourage users to write in a passive, universal voice, in order to 'optimise output.' This flattening of the prompt texts becomes a mode of erasure in itself that hides the structural violence against difference held within monolingualisms and monocultures. Even the English language itself is blind towards its many pockets of resistance (i.e. creole, pidgin, improvised dialects and so on). To illustrate the siphoning of

languages and the filtering of how environments can be known and sensed, the films were hung on walls that were inscribed with the names of around 2,000 African languages (see Figures 6.4 and 6.5). Organised in columns around the exhibition space, the language stacks served to illustrate to audiences the expanse of African and Indigenous knowledges that the LLMs cannot read and, therefore, cannot understand, translate or reproduce in their interpretation of scenes from across southern Africa. Out of the roughly 2,000 African languages only around 40 were – at the time of the exhibition – used in Natural Language Processing (NLP) and LLMs. Part of the exhibition at the Photographers' Gallery was later displayed under the title 'Data Dreams', as part of the exhibition, 'AI and the Paradox of Agency' at Bildmuseet, Umeå, 2026 (see Figure 6.5).

Because the scripts are non-linear – sometimes complete narrative, sometimes abstracted representations – some of the outputs created using 3D virtual space (as another synthesis of time and space) produced animations that added a temporal dimension to the still image. The durational photographs become something akin to a proscenium: a fixed stage in front of a curtain within which a series of events tease out the limitations



Figure 6.4

I am in your dreams but you are not in mine, 2025, exhibition detail at The Photographers' Gallery, 2026. Photo: K. E. Elliott.



Figure 6.5

Data Dreams, 2026, exhibition detail from *AI and the Paradox of Agency* at Bildmuseet, 2026. Photo: Malin Grönborg.

of computational inferences. As proceniums, the films open up portals between the past and the present and set up a relationship between the viewer and film, viewing the past to create the future gaze. They also open up questions about what kind of archival vigilance is needed in relation to AI and the archive it operates through: what kind of imaginaries of a planet is it generating? By appropriating time, the films disrupt the power of the frozen frame and add another temporality to the frame, a secret time that serves as both a reparative guide to colonial photography and a source material to feed LLMs. It points out the racist and patriarchal assumptions made when the woman in flux is materialised, then brought to the fore as a white woman and then made into a white man (visualising the signified chain of power as a racial and gendered hierarchy, see Figure 6.2). A combination of filmed photographic sequences – or still frames and text – produces this output, which fits a clear hierarchy into its use of time, from Black woman (in the original photograph), to white woman, to white man, replete in the white garments typical of colonial attire (in the AI generation in response to the reparative script of Black feminist fugitivity).

Decolonising requires an undoing of maps: to give form to the on-going processes that deplete and dispossess planetary geographies while also inspiring the imagination of reparation within the frame of restitution. *Planetary Portals* demonstrates how pressurisation – of geology to create diamonds, the underground mine, the force of patriarchy, architecture and data dreams – creates the determinants of a sedimented geography and configures the racial intensities of pressure over time. This pressure can be understood as a result of racialised spatial bifurcations and the on-going coloniality of displacement from environment. In the context of epistemic repair and disobedience – challenging knowledge practices that normalise colonial remnants of time and space (as description and practice) – we remain sceptical of the efforts to institutionalise restitution without environmental reparations and transdisciplinary methodologies that acknowledge the structural remains of colonialism. In this way, *Planetary Portals* gives time and space for the affectual force of alternative futures and imaginaries to take shape – speculative non-fictions – that refuse the imposition of psychotic dreams and their imaginaries. *Planetary Portals* confronts the ‘Big Hole’ of colonial extraction by looking for other empirical marks that disrupt the landscape and racial surfaces, examining the deep dimensionalities of colonial dreams if only to slow down the propulsion of these dreams long enough to notice their granularity and paths of divergence. Throughout this book we have attempted to show the connections between geographies of imagination and their actualisation in the ‘big picture’ of coloniality and its continuance, from here(s) to there(s). There is no single picture that answers the question of empire’s afterlives, as if a time capsule that bores through place could erupt a singular temporal explosion; rather, there were many waves of temporal explosions in the making of coloniality as a lived reality. There are the brutal bureaucracies that sought to contain those explosions, like the categories of ‘native’ and ‘raw’ that furnished the colonial portal and its hard borders that walled off and walled in too many worlds of relation. If diamond power scripts a set of instructions for approaching the pull of bad dreams that the material realities of empires of extraction (and the AI archive) exercise, its message is vigilance towards the promise of dematerialisation and deracialisation in the planetary portal Ponzi scheme that claims a singular imaginary of the earth that is subtended by an unliveable racial and environmental debt – planetary portals, not portal.



Acknowledgements

This book is the culmination of several years of collaborative work between the authors and a number of interlocutors who, at different times throughout this process and in each of their distinct and different ways, have contributed to the project by shaping our thinking and approaches in ways that have been absolutely instrumental. The portal was always imagined as a collective space to rethink geography's continuing imaginative grasp and its environmental present, and we have been fortunate that so many people have generously thought with us into that space.

First, we would like to thank Michael Salu for his engagement and contributions that were made to the wider portals project (Salu et al. 2023, Yusoff et al. 2023). Michael participated in the *Planetary Portals Collective* from 2021 to 2024 and collaborated on *Diabolical Architectures of Colonialism* and the exhibition at The Photographers' Gallery, *I am in your dreams, but you are not in mine* (2025). As a crucial part of the portals collective, he helped give the portal another form and terrain.

Second, a huge shoutout to Lesley Green and the wonderful crew at Environmental Humanities South (EHS) at Cape Town, South Africa: Nikiwe Solomon, mpho ndaba, Cecilia Y. Ojemaye, Anselmo Matusse, Nobukhosi Ngwenya and Zainab Adams. Our visit to EHS in 2024 and exchange of ideas with staff and students was formative to how the wider portals project shaped, in profound ways, the thinking that materialised in this book. Your hospitality was invaluable and we felt incredibly fortunate to spend that afternoon together at EHS, discussing potential collaborations around False Bay and, later, an afternoon at a café in Kruger National Park, reflecting upon our recently presented work and devising a plan to set up the *African, Postcolonial and Black Ecologies* reading group. The Southern African Society for Environmental Philosophy (SASEP) conference in Kruger National Park (2024), with all the contradictions that such a geography brings to the fore, was formative and thanks are due to Dr Yolandi Coetser and the organising

committee for freeing up some last-minute space for us to participate. Over the course of the following year, we hosted the reading group that crossed continents and time zones and came together to think collectively about what an African-centred environmental humanities might look like. Those ideas and discussions have shaped the intellectual scaffold of the project and provided a space to think collectively and generously. During this time, we enjoyed our continued collaboration in various guises, whether co-writing projects and grant applications, WhatsApps, and the lovely reading group that met monthly to discuss African, post-colonial and Black ecologies, and was joined by Hugo Canham, Pat Noxolo, Janet Adomako and Cajetan Iheka who talked insightfully and generously about their own works. Institutional thanks are due to Queen Mary University of London, the University of East Anglia and Research England for small grants that allowed us to keep portalling.

Third, we would like to thank our colleagues, friends and collaborators who, over the years, have provided platforms through which to showcase, present, work, discuss and critique our work, as well as creating spaces for experimenting with new forms of engagement. Thanks to Helen Pritchard for your invitation to present our initial ideas informing this work at the *Transmediale* (2023) in Berlin. Thanks for your sparring and generous hosting of the event and would also like to thank the curatorial and professional team, Bani Brusadin, Elise Hunchuck, Jade Barget, Lucas Matray, Nora Murchu and Olha Pylypenko, for making it happen. Thanks also to Wayne Modest, Esmee Schoutens and Carien Zaayman for generously hosting us at the Wereld Culturen Museum in Amsterdam (2023). Your curated programme of events was both stimulating and formed a crucial part of our thinking around displays, museums and the infamous African hut. Thanks also to Katja Kwastek and Kristine Steenbergh at the Vrije Universiteit for hosting us during a seminar with postgraduate students and a talk. Thanks to all the participants who engaged so provocatively and inspirationally with the work. Thanks also to the various archivists and librarians who offered help and guidance in locating materials and offering visitations: Tahlia Coombs, Elizabeth Green and Etienne Joseph at the Hackney Archives; Deidre Goslett and Andrea Walker at University of Cape Town Libraries; Hannah Carson at the Bodleian Library, Oxford; Valeria Carullo at RIBA Collections at the London Archives; and finally Sarah Evans at the RGS, London. We also would like to thank Lesley Lokko for inviting us to see the phenomenal show that was *The Laboratory of the Future*, La Biennale di Venezia Architecture (2023), which opened architecture to a much needed dialoging with African and African diasporic practices and gave shape to their epistemic re-configurations.

The text that forms this book has received more detailed attention from a number of colleagues. Thanks especially to our editors at Goldsmith Press, Jennifer Gabrys, Ros Gray and Shela Sheikh, who through conversation and careful attention to the written word have served as indispensable critical interlocutors with earlier versions of the work. And to the smooth production management by Ellen Parnavelas and expert copyediting of Katie Finnegan for Goldsmiths Press. We also benefited from the detailed attention of two generous readers who offered sage advice, insight and constructive support. Thanks also to our colleagues at Queen Mary University, who during a Book Writing Group provided a useful space to test and discuss the key ideas informing the project. Thanks to Carlo Inverardi-Ferri, Regan Koch, Elsa Noterman, Alastair Owens, Miles Ogborn, Nina Ramesh and Philippa Williams. We would also like to thank Ros and Suhail Malik for your invitation to present our work in progress as part of the *Postgraduate Art Public Lecture* series at Goldsmith University, providing a stimulating discussion. Thanks also to Gillian Rose for your invitation to present and discuss our work as part of the *Tech Life* series at the School of Geography and the Environment at Oxford University.

We would also like to thank the board at The Photographers' Gallery for commissioning the *Planetary Portals Collective* for the exhibition *I am in your dreams, but you are not in mine*. A special shoutout goes to Sam Mercer and Ariele Frosh for their dedicated and unwavering support in navigating the institutional politics of public exhibition making. They really understood the project, and together with Aarati Akkepeddi made an incredible contribution to furthering the work and its reach in the world. Thanks also to the wider professional and curatorial team at The Photographers' Gallery: Luisa Ulyett, Janice McLaren, Karen McQuaid, Youssra Manlaykhaf, Emma Dixon, James Cleeton and Lucia Graves. And thanks to Marcus Gilroy-Ware for hosting an online discussion. During the time of the exhibition, we were fortunate to collaborate with Felicity Hammond on co-hosting a conference – *Material Memory and the AI Archive* – with colleagues at Kingston University and Photoworks. Thanks to Felicity and Ariel Danit, Maria Mencia, Judy Price and Josie Saunders, as well as all the wonderful participants at the conference.

Published works helped advance our thinking, providing platforms and times to develop and test ideas. A chapter with the short title 'Upside-Down' was published as part of the book *Intersectional Spaces* with the Royal Institute of British Architecture and the piece entitled 'Dreaming in Continents' in the *Gropius Bau Journal* formed early stages of our collaborative work. Special thanks goes out to the editor at *Gropius Bau*, Robert Maharajh, who has become an important friend and unofficial band manager to the Portals since

the publication. The essay co-authored with Lesley Green (and Planetary Portals Collective 2025) entitled 'Bodies of Evidence, Evidence of Bodies' published in *e-flux journal* formed another conduit through which to develop our portalled perspectivism. And in conjunction with the *Inhuman Reparations* workshops, in London and at the Venice Architecture Biennale, a paper published in *South Atlantic Quarterly* (a Special Issue edited by Kathryn Yusoff, Elsa Noterman and Archie Davies) provided a final outlet to develop our ideas around photography and AI.

The dream of a portal to expand time and space had some pretty violent resonances, from the geographies of empire to its new imperial spaces of data dreams, but during the time spent in the expanded archives of our grim inheritance of colonial histories, friendship and food paved the way for this work.

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