MASTER OF FINE ART

DISSERTATION

• Ayesha Price • PRCAYE001 • February 2024 •

UNITED we stand DIVIDED we fall!

WE HAVE LOST ONE ANOTHER

University of Cape Town

ABSTRACT

This study is located in the ontologies of things that are widely identified, contested or self-determined as belonging to contemporary District Six in Cape Town, South Africa; a site of ongoing loss through settler colonialism, forced removals and now restitution. In this pivotal time of return bodies and land once displaced reunite, this study focusses on the fissure between subjects, objects and relations (things) as District Six enters the phase of reparation, redevelopment, commodification and private ownership.

This project aims to explore the possibilities of using visual art methodology as a mediator between its people and its land through the praxis of Socially Engaged Art and in dialogue with the philosophies of New Materialism and Object Oriented Ontology. As a current resident of District Six, I collaborate with human and non-human components of the ruptured District Six ecosystem to facilitate a site-specific installation that recognises people and land as equal actants in the struggle for social cohesion and social justice.

Keywords: District Six, Socially Engaged Art, New Materialism, Object Orientated Ontology, Site-specific Installation

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University of Cape Town

Master of Fine Art Dissertation

Ayesha Price

PRCAYE001

Title: We have lost one another

University of Cape Town

Supervisors: Stephané Huigen-Conradie
& Jane Alexander

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Master of Fine Art degree.

2024

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CONTENTS

Introduction **1**

PART1:
United we stand, divided we fall
Who are 'we'? **3**

PART 2:
Nothing about us without us
Methodologies towards an engaged arts practice.. **14**

PART 3:
I am every stone in this place of stones
Site-specific installation: Considerations **21**

Conclusion..... **28**

List of Illustrations **30**

References..... **32**

Appendix: Artwork

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Dedication

To my District Sixers who have been on this journey with me from the point of inception, you are valued beyond words. This is all for you.

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Sharon Storkey
Ruwayda Shaik
Connie Jacobs
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Gadija Simons
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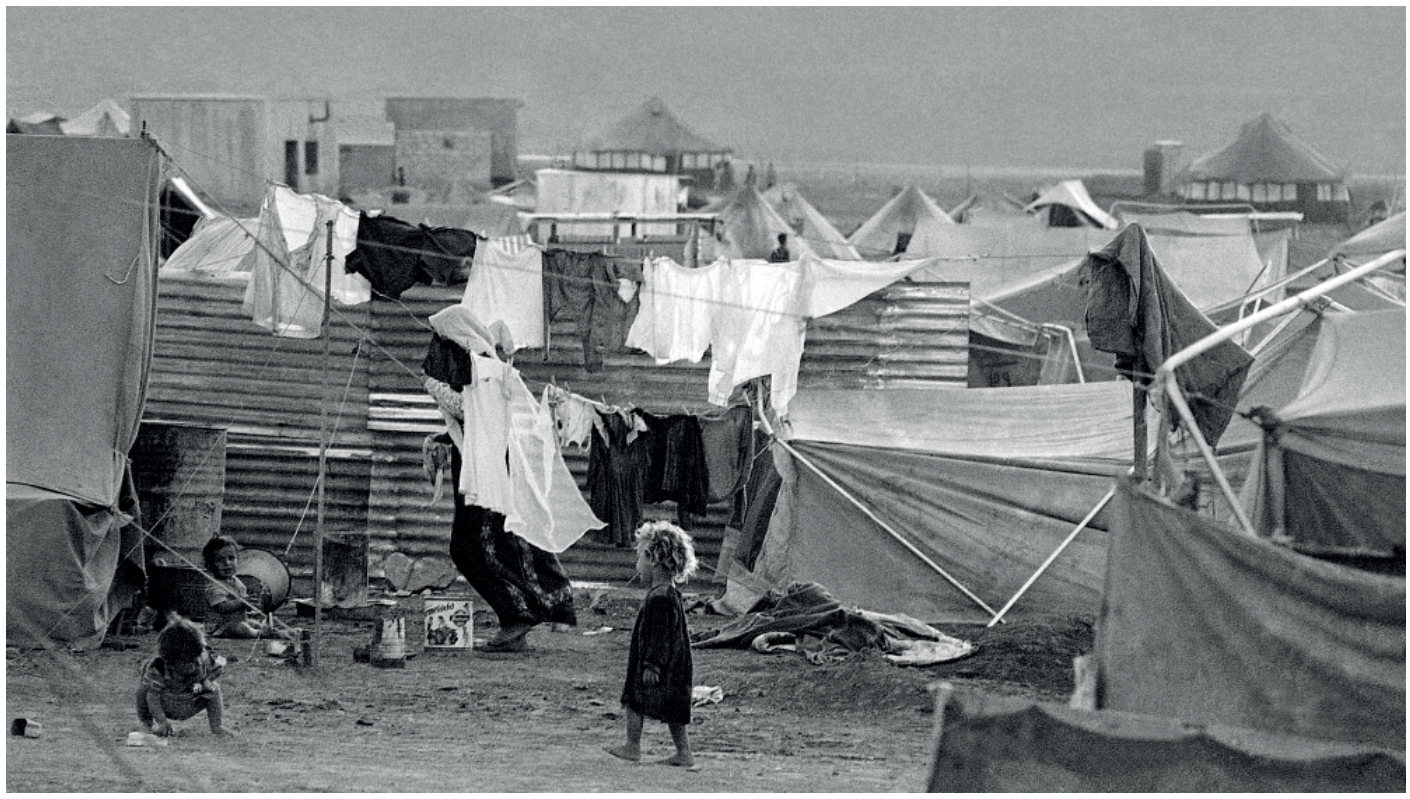


Figure 1. Al Jazeera (2020). *Children play amidst lines of laundry drying out at Baqaa Camp in Jordan in 1969*. Palestine. Photograph. Al Jazeera.



Figure 2. Jurgen Schadeberg (1955). *We won't move*. Sophiatown, South Africa. Photograph. Huffington Post.



Figure 3. Arlette Bashizi (2023). *Rosette Riziki Rutare lugged her sewing machine as she escaped M23 rebels in the hope she could avoid begging while living in a displacement camp in the eastern city of Goma.* Democratic Republic of the Congo. Photograph. The New Humanitarian.



Figure 4. Stan Winer (1974). *District Six, Cape Town, 1974-1975*. South Africa. Photograph. University of Cape Town.

INTRODUCTION

"I venture to propose that displacement is the problem the twenty-first century must solve. Africans and aborigines, rural peasants and city dwellers have been shunted from one place to another as progress has demanded, 'Land here!' or 'People there!'. In cutting the roots of so many people, we have destroyed language, culture, dietary traditions, and social bonds. We have lined the oceans with bones and filled the garbage dumps with bricks" (Fullilove 2004:5).

The violent thrust of forced removals and displacement that shatters an ecosystem reverberates through time and space, setting the residual, fragmented substances and relations into a spinning trajectory that strives to regain control but remains forever altered and bound to the violent act. Even when the bricks return to clay, bone to sediment and relations to histories of the victors; these eroded things[1] become the building blocks from which futures are constituted and constructed (see figures 1-4).

This document and the exhibition *We have lost one another*, explore the material possibilities that emerge from the ruins of violent destructions that occurred in District Six, Cape Town, between 1968 and 1982 (Soudien 1990:143). By following theories that privilege the connection between land, people, objects, and relations, this accompanying text examines how the displaced people and residents of District Six consider the connections to current and future return, redevelopment, and reparation.

Finding means to safely dissect who we are, how we got here, and envision and morally plan our way into the future is my concern as a survivor of forced removals and participant in the fight to reclaim control over our reality, the legacies, and family we have lost. This study is located in the ontologies of things that are widely identified, contested or self-determined as belonging to contemporary District Six in Cape Town, South Africa; a site of ongoing loss through settler colonialism, forced removals and now restitution. In this pivotal time, when traumatised bodies reunite with traumatised land, this study focuses on the fissure between subjects, objects and relations (things) as District Six enters the phase of reparation, redevelopment, commodification and private ownership. My research has been directed to the impact of restitution after forced removals: on the land and on the people who lay claim to the land. I have focussed on the District Six area where the establishment of a small returnee community has raised divides in the District Six diaspora, previously united mainly through memories of shared lives and loss and a sense of longing for home. Who belongs in and to District Six now that it enters the phase of private ownership? How do the memory, concept or projection of District Six before displacement and the reality of an inhabited District Six impact upon each other? What is the future for District Six?[2]

"'Land here!' or 'People there!'"

My area of research has largely been influenced by the seemingly inescapable confluence of art and my life in District Six over the past twenty-five years: as a teacher at the local public art school, as a volunteer, art facilitator and curator with the District Six Museum, as a new resident and local artist with maternal links to the neighbourhood before forced removals[3]. This situatedness of my art practice's engagement with the swilling ideas about and through District Six's 'things' has given me the opportunity to explore living memory, current conditions and future concerns through daily living and the numerous workshops I have facilitated with

1 In this document I refer to all entities: material and relational, tangible and intangible, human and non-human, real and sensory; as things. This is done as an act of humility, not objectification, in my support for a world not dominated by human privilege or anthropocentrism at the expense of all the other things on this planet or this universe which are agentic, mostly, beyond our comprehension. To equate oneself with things can elevate our regard for the agency of all things.

2 The aim of this project is not to answer all of these questions, but it attempts to begin to understand the scope of what an artistic and visual manifestation of these questions might begin to unpack.

3 "I'm shocked to hear people are living here 20 years, 25 years already and I'm thinking these are new people", Nadiema Safter, Director of the District Six Foundation and a neighbour whose family has lived in the same home in District Six for almost 100 years (Safter 2023). The area beneath the Nelson Mandela Boulevard largely escaped demolition due to its proximity to factories and industries.



Figure 5: Ayesha Price. 2023. *Fabric*. Cement, plaster, fibre, earth matter and acrylics.

District Sixers to produce public art or commemorative events and exhibitions. [4]

As an arts educator and visual arts practitioner who has actively engaged in art projects in District Six since 1997, I sincerely believe that visual arts methodology can create the physical and cognitive spaces in which we can imagine and create a better world together. In an open-ended manner, this study centres the engagement and input of participants (people and land) to discuss who and what constitutes 'us' and where our past and present trajectories are leading us. An ontological approach is used to explore how all things in District Six rely on each other to exist, with emphasis on humans and land as physical, sensory spaces and sites of memory and agency. This approach allows me to expand our understanding of how we can unpack and improve our realities through material things and objects. Central to this work is the recognition that reclaiming the land means working with it empathetically and collaboratively, to relate to it as more than just a transferable commodity. For example, the data that constitutes this study emerged from a series of creative workshops, site walks, and interviews with current and ex-residents that occurred in District Six in 2023, as well as my own autoethnographic work as a scholar, practitioner, and resident in the community of District Six. In this way, the conversations, physical and everyday interactions, and practical collaborations engender a meaningful, empathetic and productive debate about what it means to belong and coexist.

These social and creative gatherings also respond to the call by the Seven Steps[5] members of the District Six Museum for ceramics classes and more creative workshops that explore District Six as a site of memory in which their stories can be further developed through unexpected mediums and within a community of care and joy.[6] This study aims to create a critical reflection of my practice to further develop spaces and events that can recall community on an ongoing basis; where we can perceive, reflect upon and experiment with our relationships and environment safely, critically and creatively.

As a current resident of District Six with maternal links to the area pre-forced removals, I want to see the resident community, the returning community and the larger District Six diaspora who will never return there to live; prepare to face the tests restitution presents and challenge the certainty of who we are and what belongs to us. I want District Sixers to identify and examine, not perpetuate, our relations with violence and trauma associated with territorial insecurity so we can redirect our energies towards the redevelopment of District Six as a community of care. I therefore collaborated with human and non-human components of the ruptured District Six ecosystem to bring about a site-specific installation in District Six that recognised people and land as equal actants in the struggle for social cohesion and social justice, by fostering social situations in which we aesthetically configure multi-authored, open-ended narratives and metaphors that explores our ontologies. These stories were then further activated and contributed to by those who engage with the installation as they traverse the large tract of bulldozed, overgrown inner-city land upon which traces of old roads and new pedestrian pathways are evident. The resulting artwork offered a short-lived, non-commodifiable experience and gathering, where participants explored the stories in which 'people' and 'land' are interchangeable.

This project aimed to explore the possibilities of using visual art methodology as a mediator between people and land through the praxis of Socially Engaged Art in dialogue with the philosophies of New Materialism and Object Oriented Ontology. This document contextualises this approach to art practice and theory, which relies on a socially responsible and ethical framework that prioritises debate, collaboration and social interaction while de-centring the human as the only actant in the process of re-establishing and making connections when reconstituting an environment or ecosystem. This study is presented as a model for a methodology of socially engaged public art that contributes to posthuman thinking through its consideration of the representation of the relations, illusions and constructs of the human and non-human in the context of forced removals.

4 My position as a resident and artist from within the community allows this project to proceed as a secure level of trust and familiarity has been established over many years. This position is affirmed by artist Rick Lowe who is seasoned in collaborative practice: 'You have to spend years developing relationships… It'd be an arrogant disregard of a community to come in and think you can grasp all the complexities of a place in a short time' (Miranda 2014).

5 www.districtsix.co.za/project/seven-steps-club-for-district-six-ex-residents/

6 Seven Steps members are ex-residents of District Six who get together once a month. These meetings vary from being storytelling and reminiscence sessions, opportunities for oral history interviews, fact-checking and information-gathering, ideas generation, memorialisation discussions and debates about contemporary issues. I have facilitated numerous workshops with this group over since 2015, producing artwork for commemorative events, exhibitions and public art works.

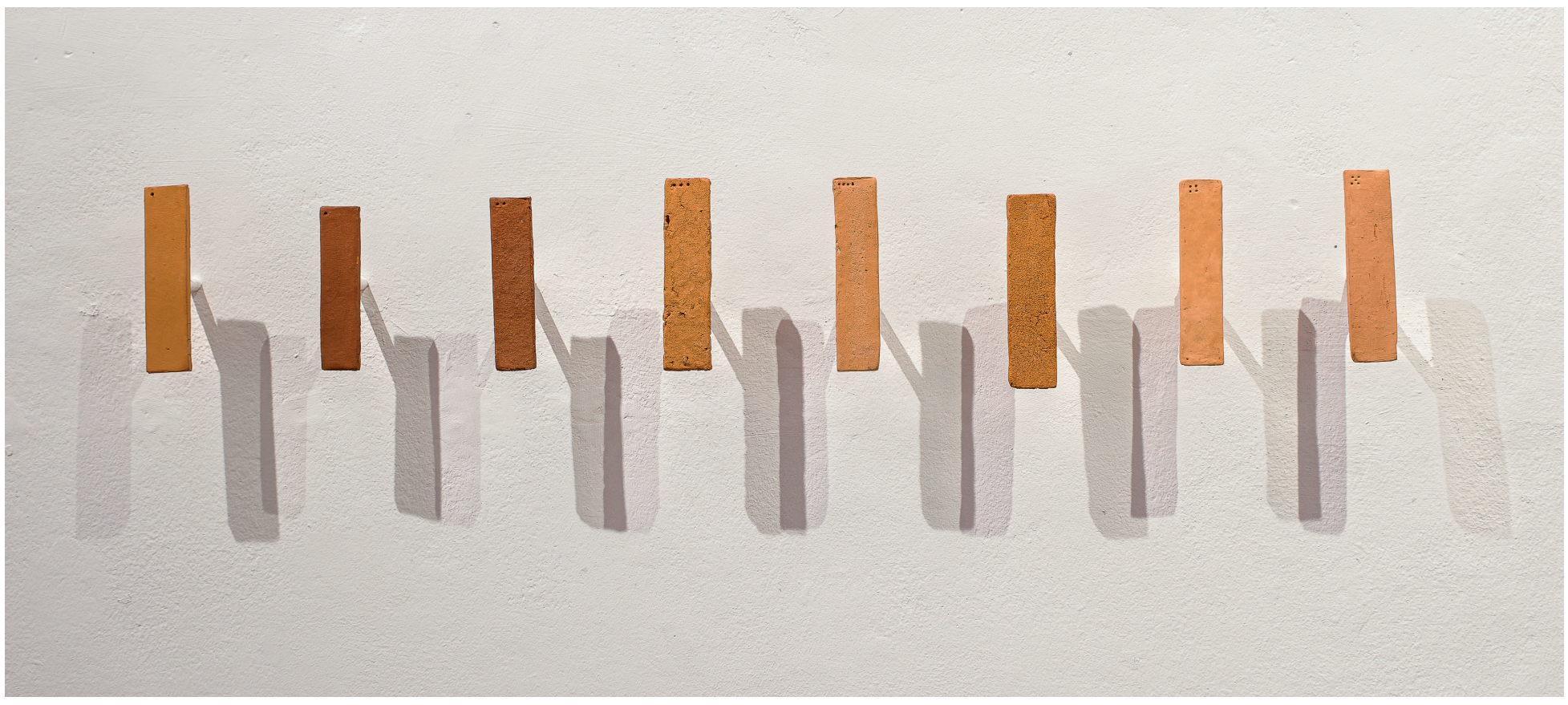


Figure 6: Ayesha Price. 2022. *Community*. Fired District Six clay.

PART 1:
United we stand, divided we fall

Who are ‘we’?

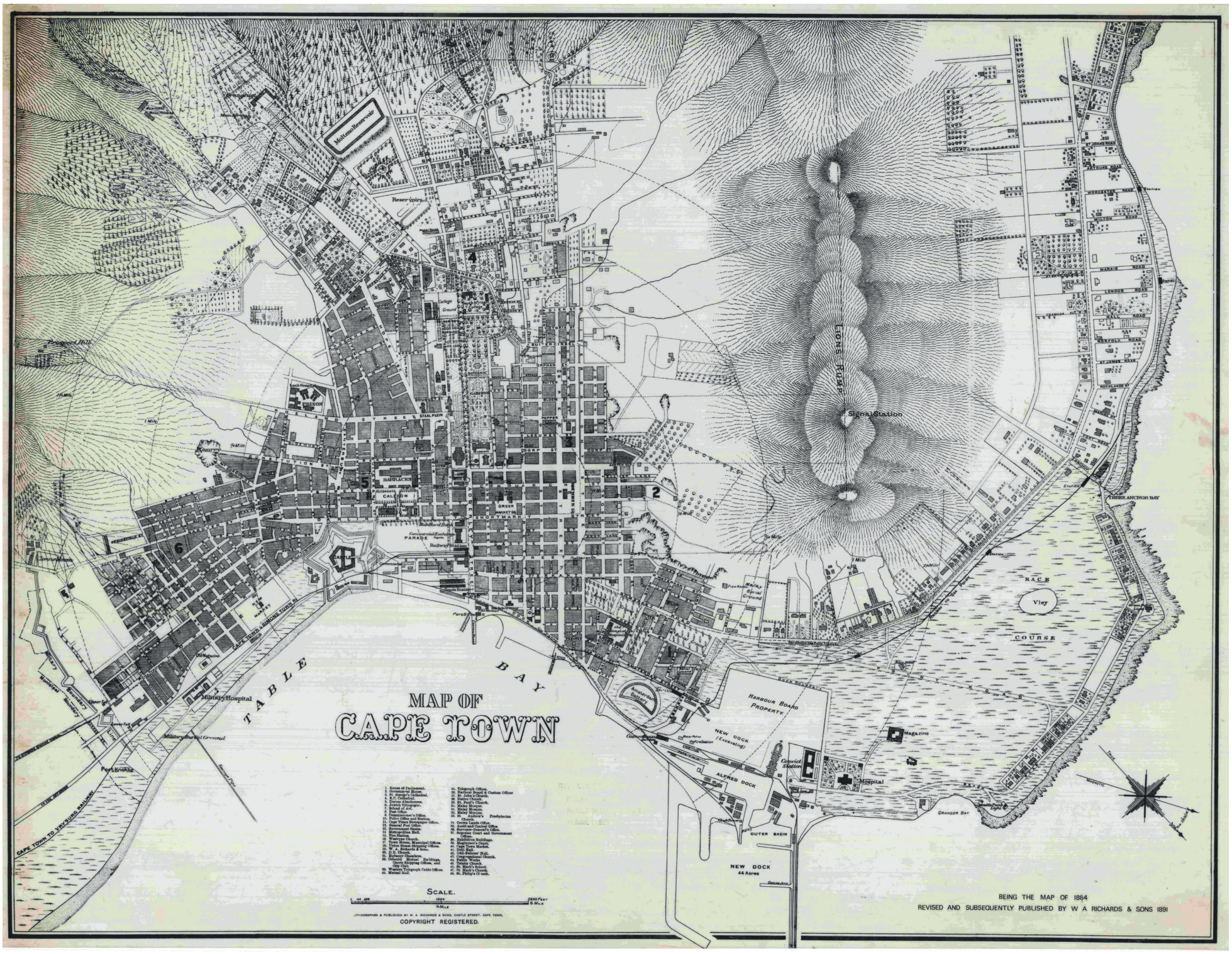


Figure 7. *Map of Cape Town* (1891). National Libraries of South Africa.

“[Forced removals] dares not be forgotten because its impact still prevails in the spatial and psychic lives of so many and holds a key to understanding the pathologies that still pervade South African society: ‘the legacy of apartheid cannot be discarded altogether, as it remains inscribed materially in the urban geography of South Africa and figuratively in the collective trauma of its population” (Ignatieff 1996:4).

Cape Town is South Africa’s oldest city and is widely considered its most segregated (Turok, Visagie & Scheba 2021:71). Its current social composition and spatial divisions are a direct result of three hundred years of colonial and apartheid management (see figures 7-8). Boundaries, real and imagined, were implemented to sever the relationships of ‘non-Europeans’ to prime land and natural resources when the first Dutch settlers denied Khoekhoen herders from occupying the same space as them in the 1650s. Today these physical boundaries define our segregated city (South African History Online 2019).

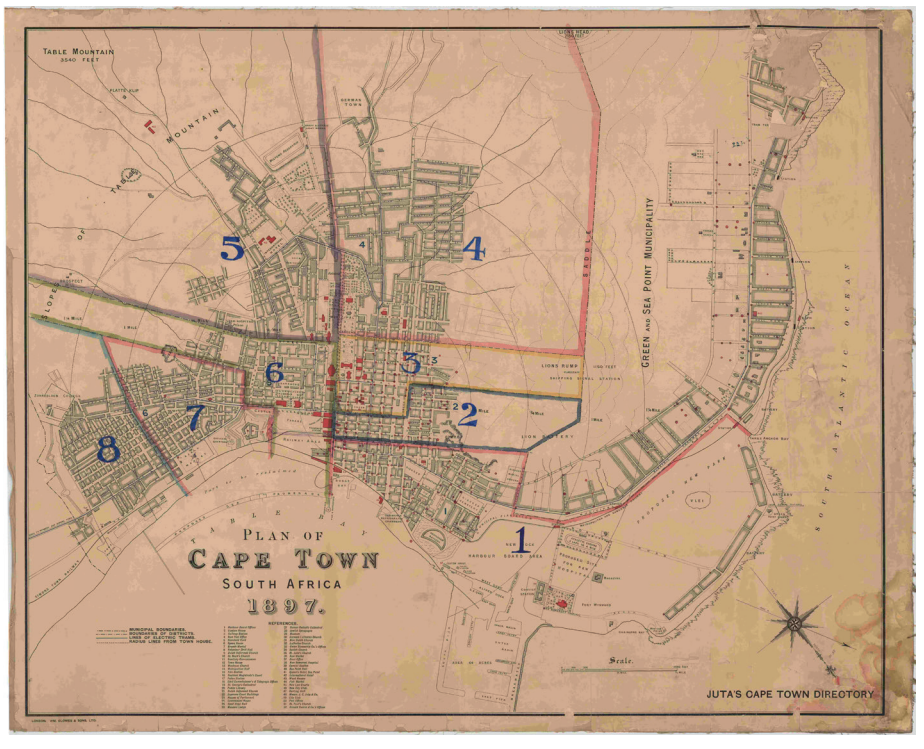


Figure 8. *Plan of Cape Town* (1897). National Libraries of South Africa.

PART 1: United we stand, divided we fall

Who are 'we'?

Legislative measures to enforce separate development and placement of people according to race classification, to privilege the ruling minority and demolish the political agency of the majority, reached full systemic potency when Apartheid was legally introduced in South Africa in 1948.The Population Registration Act of 1950, "the bureaucratic cornerstone of the Apartheid state" according to Keith Breckenridge (2014:225) was an attempt to produce permanent criteria for racial classifications which divided communities and families along racial lines.[7] Population registers recorded each citizen's derived identity and race listed together with place of residence, employment, marital status and dependants, place of birth, etcetera, cementing one's place in an engineered society (ibid., p.227). This Act demonstrated the National Party's commitment to the preservation of racial hierarchy, one of the central issues during the 1948 election, fanned by the white constituency's fears of '*die swart gevaar*' (the black menace) which threatened to engulf cities (Posel 2001:98).

The Group Areas Act of 1950, fortified by the Housing Act, the Community Development Act, the Separate Amenities Act and the Slums Act, was designed to eliminate existing social structures and construct separate living conditions for Whites, Indians and Coloureds in particular. Legislation for creating separate, remote Black urban townships had been implemented decades earlier under the Native Land Act of 1913 (Modise, Mtshiselwa 2013). These Acts called for spatial planning in accordance with the National Party's ideal of complete racial segregation and specified procedures to be applied in the valuation of affected land, notification, arbitration, compensation, transfer, litigation and eviction (Johnson-Castle 2014).

District Six was home to almost ten percent of Cape Town's population (South African History Archive,2010) and therefore contributed greatly to the city's status as the least segregated city in the time before the Group Areas Act (Saff 1996:237). Established as the sixth municipal district in Cape Town in 1867, it was composed of the descendants of indigenous inhabitants, formerly enslaved people and colonial settlers and immigrants from across the African continent and Asia (Prosalendis 1999:135). The forcible removal of the aforementioned people from their century long cohabitation and intermingling on prime, elevated inner city land with its sea views and proximity to the harbour and clear mountain streams was utterly disgraceful under the Apartheid rule (see figure 9). On 11 February 1966, District Six was declared a White Area under the Group Areas Act.

"District Six is a blot which the government has cleaned up and will continue to clear up."

Prime Minister P.W Botha, 1979 (The Black Sash 1980).

Approximately 60 000 people were forcibly removed and displaced to new racially exclusive settlements in the low-lying Cape Flats up to 60 km outside of the city, between 1968 and 1982 (see figures 10-11). I grew up in Parkwood Estate on the Cape Flats, where people who were forcibly removed from the choicest parts of the Cape Town, like District Six, were dumped under the Group Areas Act.

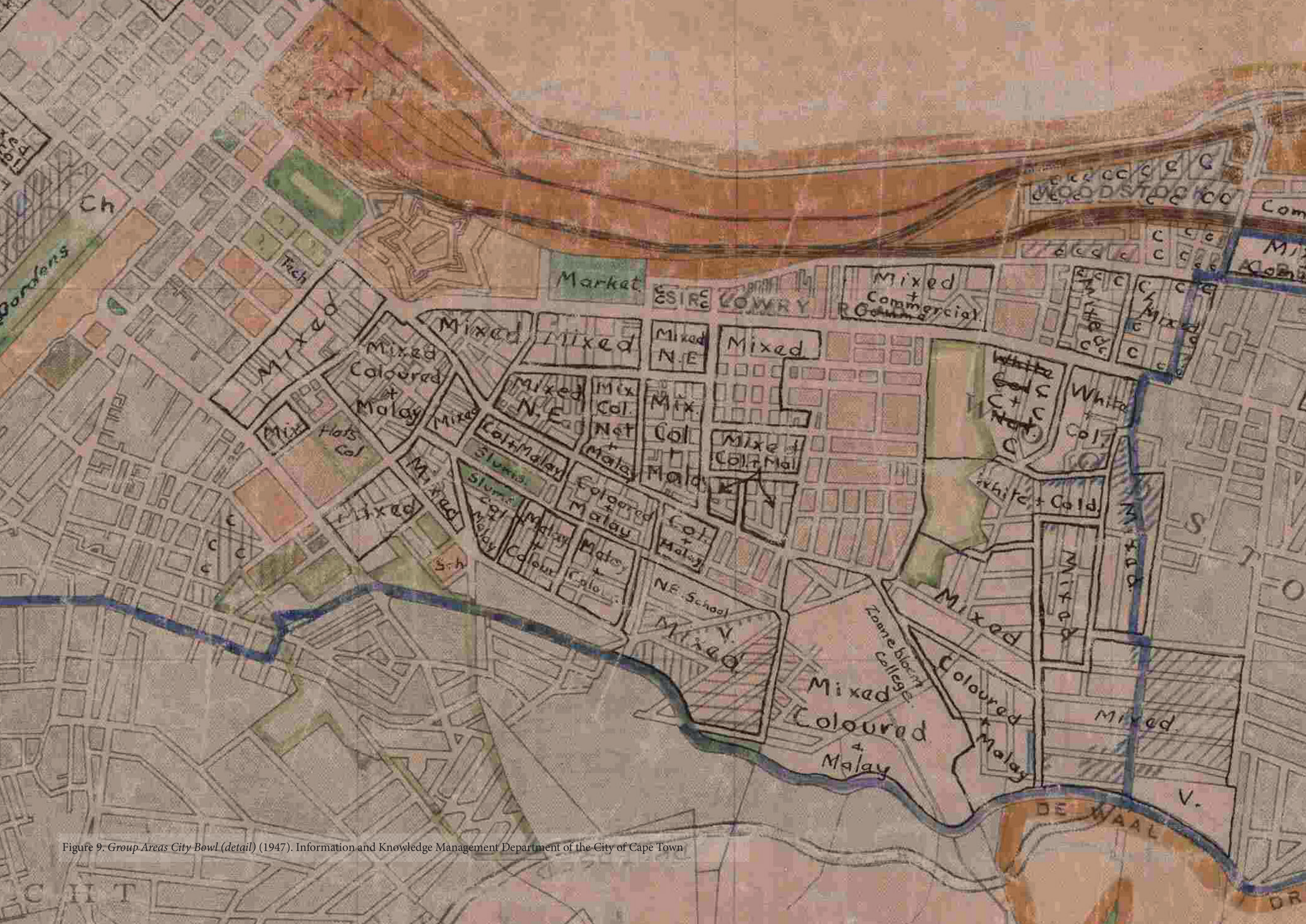
I now know that the surrounding area was also a site from which people were forcibly removed to make way for us under the Group Areas Act. Klip Road, the southern boundary between Parkwood and the adjacent neighbourhood (Grassy Park) previously known as Cook's Bush or De Klip was home to 2600-3900 people who were all classified as African and relegated to an official camp in Nyanga from 1953 to 1958 (Legassick 2006).

In my youth, I was unaware that my immediate neighbours were displaced from Simon's Town, Constantia, Claremont, District Six and Green Point; the trauma of forced removals was never discussed. Instead, the resulting anger, despair, defensiveness, self-destruction, shame, de-personalisation and re-enactment of the abuse became normalised in our fledgling communities.[8] I draw from Boym's (2001) musings on nostalgia to think through my own experiences of the intermittent "outbreaks of nostalgia" among the elders, regaled stories of "phantom homelands" .Their oft-repeated stories about casually walking to town or the beach in the middle of the night, exacerbated the frustrations of the youth who were burning mattresses and tyres in the streets to protest their living conditions under Apartheid.

As children and teenagers in the 1980s, we did not want to dwell amidst the spectres of past communities with our elders. Nostalgia was rubbed into us like a balm; as we listened to retellings of stories while we ate, polished brass, prepared tables or wrapped and unwrapped objects in tissue paper according to a Gregorian calendar. These memories, material objects and rituals connected theatrically in local homes, delivered the morals of our story which focussed on what Elaine Salo refers to as ordentlikheid or respectability under the dire circumstances of Apartheid life (2018:139). But we were aflame with the idea that we could create a just and free society by dismantling Apartheid through mass action: attending, mobilising and organising awareness programs and protests. I attended my first student mass rally at the age of twelve in 1987. I still marvel at the discipline that was maintained at those meetings where thousands of teenagers would gather to listen, chant, learn from their peers, follow meeting protocols and put plans into action.

7 Keith Breckenridge, the author of The Book of Life: The South African population register and the invention of racial descent, focuses on the political effects of biometric identification systems on the African Continent.

8 Elaine Salo discusses the social and political dynamics of an indigent Cape Flats community displaced by the Group Areas Act in terms of gendered power struggles that give rise to gangsterism and violence in an effort to forge new personhoods to break free from the constraints of the community forged by forced removals (Salo 2018).


Market
Mixed
Mixed
Mixed

PART 1: United we stand, divided we fall

Who are 'we'?

I became a regular volunteer to paint banners, design pamphlets and draw logos or illustrations for student movements. It was then that I realised that I could use my inclination for visual art in an incredibly dynamic way while serving a social justice agenda. The feverish hours spent composing and producing anonymous works in secret rooms within a covert team, handing them over and seeing them activated in the thronging masses supporting and amplifying the impact of the event; provided me with an intense sense of purpose and meaning that alluded me when I practised oil painting in my dad's garage while the world outside was burning.

I have lived in District Six, the birthplace of my maternal grandmother and great-grandmother for the past 25 years. Here I taught at a public art school for 15 years and created collaborative, site-specific public artworks and projects with the District Six Museum and the larger District Six community on an ongoing basis since 2007.[9] My physical engagement with this area started in 1997, when newly graduated, I started teaching at the Children's Art Centre.[10]

This historic art school is on the picturesque Zonnebloem Estate overlooking District Six.[11]



Figure 10. NASA Landsat image (2007). *Satellite image of Cape peninsula*. Table Mountain and the Cape's prime property on its' slopes are in the foreground. The Cape Flats are the low laying, flat sections directly behind it, recognisable by its large tracts of light sandy areas. NASA Image and Video Library.

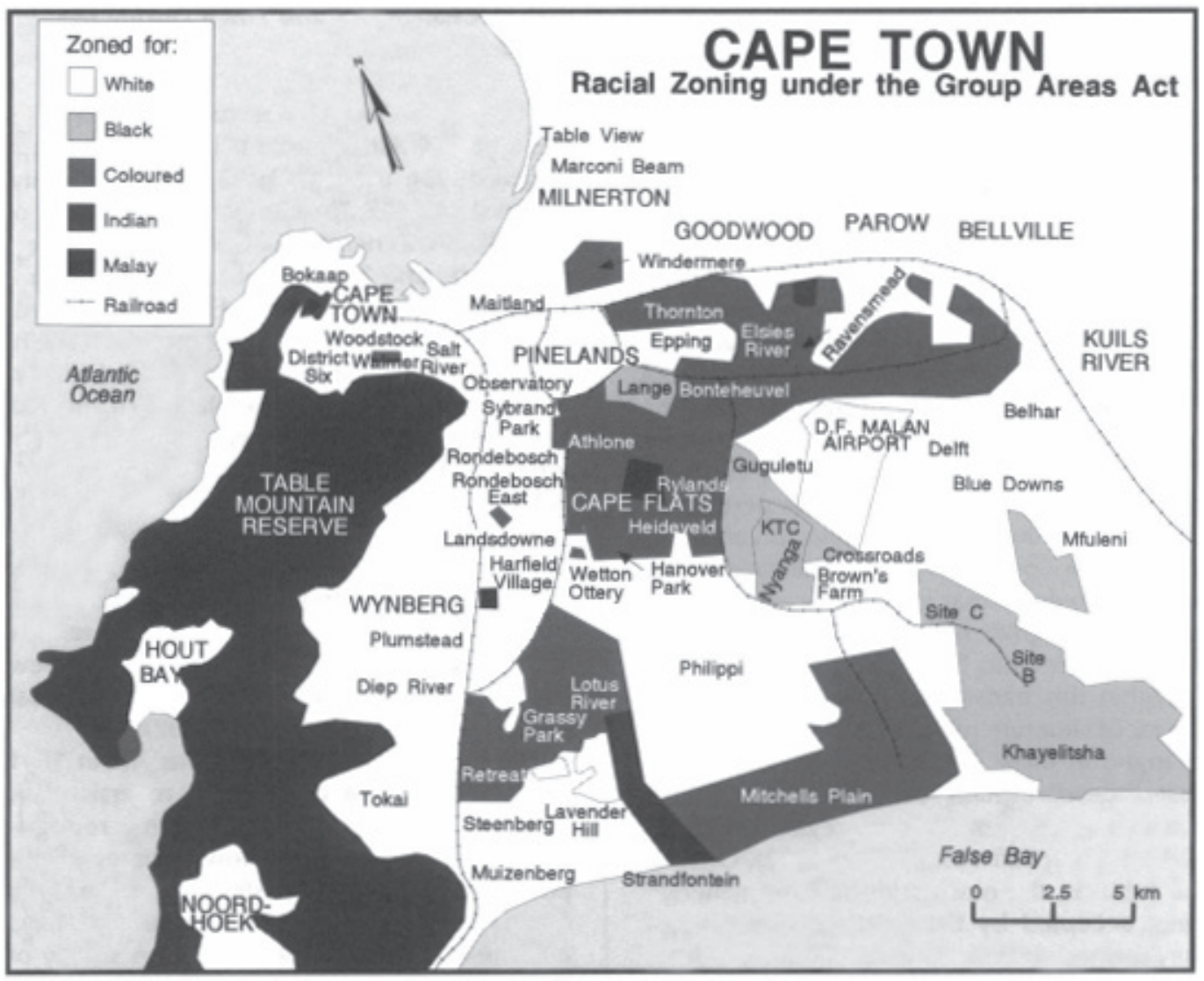


Figure 11. Grant Saff (1966). *Cape Town showing racial zoning prior to June 1991-based on Cook 1991*. Annals of the Association of American Geographers.

9 Artists I have trained, learnt from and collaborated with on public art projects include elderly ex-residents who are desperate to return before they die in gang-infested areas; current residents and their children who have returned and have been re-traumatised since 2004, school-going youth, educators, informal dwellers or 'homeless' residents who face forced removal every day and my own neighbours.

10 Each year, the Children's Art Centre offers art classes to thousands of children who travel from the Cape Flats into the city for its public schools. Once known as the Coloured Children's Art Centre it has been in operation since 1945 and fell victim to the Group Areas Act in District Six and then again in Woodstock.

11 The Zonnebloem Estate was one of the first farms that supplied fresh produce to ships during colonial times. It was the stately home of the captain of the Cape Cavalry in the 1700's, a slave holding and the location of the 'Kafir College' established to gentrify the children of amaXhosa chiefs who were subject to the forced expansion of the Cape Colony

I had very little comprehension of the context of the beautiful, vast and steep open spaces of land between the mountain, the sea and the city. This desolate space where a community once thrived resembled an untended and overgrown gravesite and conflicted with my grandmother's nostalgic stories that I now carried as my memories.

The red earth at the foot of the mountain was so very different to the grey mix of dune sand, gravel and silt that we played with as children in flat and low-lying Parkwood (see figure 13). Soil that blistered when water was added to make cakes and could not hold form, instead slumping and crumbling. Soil that caused skin irritations due to pollutants and sand lice. Soil that required heavy composting and chemical modification to bring forth the green bounty so easily yielded in the places we once lived. This aeolian sand, carried and formed by the winds that whip the coastal plain of Cape Flats has little to no plasticity left (Day and Fouche 2022:19). A fitting metaphor for the people who repeatedly found themselves thrust across spaces by forces determined to divide and break, not bend. Yet according to their research in their geotechnical survey of Cape Flats sand, Nanine Day and Peter Fouche found that deep below the porous surface are low quantities of mineral-rich, life-giving, retentive, and rooted clay that can assume any shape or form according to human will. These low quantities also create a dry stability of the land, preventing the formation of a collapsible fabric (ibid 2022:21). Their research compels me to ask what creative possibilities and material wealth lie beneath the (ruined) foundations of our neighbourhoods, the ones from which we were removed, the ones we reluctantly call home, and the ones we long to but can never return. This question encourages me to reposition neighbourhoods on the Cape Flats such as Parkwood or destroyed neighbourhoods such as District Six as sites of rebirth rather than only derelict zones devoid of life.

My interest in ceramics is located within the relationship between earth matter and human bodies and the conditions and desires that shape and support us. Earth matter and its clay extracts are the materials I identify most with memory and resurrection or recreation. It is specific to a site and community. Regardless of whether it is commercially produced or harvested wild, it holds within it the memory of creation, deconstruction and reconstruction (Von Maltitz 2021:59). Soil is a powerful actant in our ecosystems, without it, life would seize. Actant, coined by Bruno Latour in 1996 to refer to a thing or entity,[12] human or non-human that is a source



Figure 12. *District Six wiped off the map* (1982). The demolition of District Six and the crushing of its' brick homes resulted in a reddening of the earth. Information and Knowledge Management Department of the City of Cape Town.

during the colonial period (Hodgson 2018). Replacing 'District Six' with the name 'Zonnebloem' represented a final step in erasing the memory of the area under Apartheid. On the 17th of December 2019, the South African National Department of Arts and culture announced that the official geographical name of the suburb called Zonnebloem was reverted to District Six (Sidimba 2019).

12 Bruno Latour is emeritus professor in political arts (SPEAP) of Sciences Po Paris. He has curated Critical Zones at the Center for Art and Media ZKM (August 2020) and the Taipeh Biennale of Art (October 2020). http://www.bruno-latour.fr/



Figure 13. Alexander, E. (2018). *People of Parkwood camp out on May 22, 2018, to keep an eye on their piece of land they marked out to build makeshift structures near the M5*. Photograph. Times Live.

PART 1: United we stand, divided we fall

Who are ‘we’?



Figure 14. Price, A (2024). *Composite of four 1935 aerial photographs from the City of Cape Town of District Six and Woodstock Beach.*

of action and that can modify another entity; is widely used in the theories of New Materialism. This is to advocate for more egalitarian relationships between people and other material entities, made of the same matter, caught up in the same currents of life (Bennet 2010: ix).

Earth matter assimilates all life after death, extracting and transforming other matter, absorbing and reflecting trauma and energy to shape and replenish our environments. It holds within its being, the minerals that feed the human desire to occupy and own spaces for the purpose of dominion. It creates the holding space for roots and foundations to support wholesome living and belonging. It has witnessed the advent of the anthropocentric era and I wonder if it will survive us as we rip it apart, pour concrete into and probe it with steel and wage wars in its name. I wonder if it misses those of us in the places where we shared and honoured it as a partner or mother. I wonder how much it hurt when we were uprooted and how it will respond to our return.

Its inherent material vitality is visible and palpable, it predates and postdates us. It lives alongside us in a world of human privilege, where we constrain its existence to merely serve our selfish human purposes. As people who have been dehumanised and have had all agency stripped from us for selfish human purposes and social experiments like Apartheid, for how long can we deny earth matter and soil the agency and respect we demand for ourselves? How can we deny that it falls outside the banner of we?

My initial survey of the earth matter of District Six and consequent investigations into its characteristics as an art material, or art accomplice, revealed that the striated red, yellow, purple, brown and white chunks of ‘wild clay’ gathered on the Table Mountain slopes, collected from municipal earthworks or from beneath pavements while optical fibre cables were



Figure 15. *District Six and the Cape Town harbour* (2024). Google Maps.

being laid;[13] constituted compacted and deteriorated building materials such as terracotta bricks, gypsum and plaster or lime- based mortar.[14] The clay deposits, formed by silt matter washed by rain and caked on the land surface were also collected. The material collected from various spots was ceremoniously washed and once sieved as if panning for gold, proved to yield varying levels of oxides and plastic body which responded very well to kiln firing and wood firing. I was reminded while displacing the soil and stone from site to studio of how the bulldozed homes and building detritus; the tangible remains of District Six - its indestructible and transmutable matter holding memory, was deposited as landfill elsewhere.

The transferral and transmission of land through human bodies, whether legally and bureaucratically, through settler colonialism or hard labour is of great concern in this project, equal to its transformation. Prosalendis (1999) cites a brief excerpt from Apartheid's Department of Community Development to a municipal foreman: 'dump District Six into Table Bay', which he duly did. This act of violent erasure: bulldozing and crushing homes and disposing of the remains in the sea has resulted in the venerated, pitted landscape in District Six and as landfill has contributed to the 200 hectares added to the city of Cape Town to extend the harbour and the destruction of the local Woodstock Beach (Clarke, Fisher & Kuipers 2021:198-205). In figures 12 and 13, we can see how the destruction of District Six and the construction of the harbour has affected the spatial and social structure of the city.

13 In an effort to ethically collect earth matter, I studied the Heritage Impact Assessment reports for District Six to identify areas that were of archaeological significance and to get the dates and locations for excavations so that I did not have to dig, but forage. See the following reports: https://sahris.sahra.org.za/heritage-reports/final-d6-phase-4-hia

14 Soil scientist, Lucian Fredericks performed tests on my samples to determining presence of certain minerals which would affect its performance in a kiln and its solidity thereafter. For example, high levels of calcium carbonate from lime or cement would cause the fired object to crumble when wet.

PART 1: United we stand, divided we fall

Who are 'we'?

Von Maltitz speaks of another instance of symbolic earth matter transferral referring to Camposanto Monumentale, a cemetery to which fifty-three galleys of sacred earth were transferred from Jerusalem to Piza, Italy by sea in 1192 to be `kept alive' in cultural memory, 'not unlike the claiming of land by the conquerors of a country'. This site-specific receptacle (see figure 16) was designed to ensure that pilgrims walk over the graves (see figure 17), rather than the elevated earth from the Holy Land, fortifying the connectivity between the two sites of power while dismissing human bodies, lives and deaths (2022:29-32).

These examples of land transferral as a show of autocratic power rely on modes of erasure, visibility and invisibility to drastically alter sites (of memory) to suit and impose tyrannical and oppressive systems upon the public. Andrew Poe (2011), in his review of 'Things beyond Objects New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics', a collection of essays by leading thinkers in the new materials movement welcomes and problematises the inclusion of non-human things to political agency as opposed to being political tools.



Figure 16. Jessica (2021). *Camposanto Monumentale central area*. Pisa, Italy. Photograph. Gold Coloured Fox.



Figure 17. Jessica (2021). *Camposanto Monumentale underfoot tombs*. Pisa, Italy. Photograph. Gold Coloured Fox.

The division between humans and land created by our attitude of human centrality and our claim of dominion over all things non-human is leading us to the destruction of the ecological world. Our irresponsibility at distinguishing ourselves from the contexts that we are embedded in, separating ourselves from the things around us in terms of agency like water, food or the ground matter we live on, privileging ourselves above all other things affects more than 'us' (2011:154).

I am also reminded, while I take back the land, one handful at a time, of Francis Alÿs's videoed performance *When Faith Moves Mountains (Cuando la fe mueve montañas)* 2002 (Francisalys 2002), in which five hundred people move a sand dune on the periphery of Lima, Peru by shovelling in unison (see figures 18-19).

This decision and collaboration with the affected public to redress social injustices is a metaphor for Latin American society where very little changes have taken place despite maximum collective efforts (MOMA 2011). What mattered most here are the memories made by participants and how they will experience the mythologising of the event in the future - not that they only created minimal physical displacement of the dune, but that they created a powerful metaphor for 'will' (Guggenheim 2002).

It is with this spirit that I worked with participants as collaborators in my project – the physical rewards of art production are linked to, but secondary, to the social benefits when art is used as a tool for learning and living, not merely as a commodity to be bought and sold. The value of shared memory and acts of solidarity (working together towards a considered showing) lives on and becomes more vivid through sharing and upon reflection.

The shared experiences of surviving systemic racial oppression since colonialism, witnessing the demolition of District Six and forced relocation into poverty traps under Apartheid, created communal empathy and solidarity among the District Six diaspora.



Figure 18. Alÿs, F. 2002. *When Faith Moves Mountains*. Lima, Peru. Photograph. MOMA.



Figure 19. Alÿs, F. 2002. *When Faith Moves Mountains*. Lima, Peru. Still from video. M HKA, Antwerp.

PART 1: United we stand, divided we fall

Who are 'we'?

When remembering together, these terrible divisive and humiliating events are always deflected with the beautiful, tender moments of life in District Six; creating a portal in time powered by collective nostalgia; united in the "longing for a home that no longer exists" (Boym 2001: xv). But those few who have already returned from the far, sandy corners of the Cape Flats, to which they were banished, are now faced with the concrete issues of belonging – to the environment, in time and to each other. They are creating a new and different District Six through their lived experiences. This moment when longing is replaced with belonging when only a few of the dispossessed have been compensated with homes and start to establish a new identity for District Six, has resulted in an end to a mutual understanding of who and what constitutes the District Six community.

Returnees are struggling to build trust and a safe community with shared values while their neighbours are all strangers suffering from the same complex trauma.[15] These traumas governed by fear responses to threats of further deprivation through victimisation are now compounded by the threats of gentrification, inner-city crime and the high cost of living. Film companies, media groups and corporations, non-governmental organisations, local and national political parties and foreign investors who desire to capitalise on their mythology, memories and location, offer trinkets in exchange for financial gain or cultural clout. Taxis and busses use undeveloped parts of District Six as makeshift ranks, where they park in the streets off-peak hours, impeding traffic, running small businesses from their vehicles and leaving raw sewage on pavements and verges behind. Local and national government structures encourage each phase of development to form their own civic associations and communities instead of one civil body and have divided the site between municipal wards, with separate ward councillors. There are also separate neighbourhood watches. Elderly and infirm returnees are only able to leave their third-floor flats every few months, assisted, for medical emergencies as they cannot climb the stairs. Poor quality housing due to corruption in the construction tenders has resulted in severe sewage and water eruptions and disruptions, crumbling walls and inadequate security in newly built residences.

15 Complex trauma refers to a much more pervasive and complicated type of trauma that occurs repeatedly and cumulatively, usually over a period of time and within specific relationships and contexts during which the victim is entrapped and conditioned in a variety of ways. Any development is often seriously compromised (Courtois 2004).



Figure 20. Magdalene George (2012). 18 Years after the end of Apartheid, District Six residents were evicted from their homes by their landlord. Some families had lived there for more than 100 years. Reproduced by permission of Sara Dekhordi.

Ex-residents who are waiting to return or have no prospects to return are questioning the validity of returnees' claims as the land becomes developed and privatised amidst allegations of corruption. Claimants rent out the homes intended for returnees to people who do not understand the context into which they move, are not inclined to stabilise or build a community or even acknowledge neighbours who are healing through their return. Below the Nelson Mandela highway, residents who live in homes that escaped demolition under forced removals are seen as having no or 'lesser' trauma than returnees and not deserving of inclusion under the banner of District Six, or public funding in that name, by National Government who insist that only returnees are District Sixers.[16] Groups of residents as victims of displacement are actively pushing for the eviction of the enormous amount of informal dwellers and migrant communities who have found refuge in the neighbourhood.

The dilemmas and divisions expressed here are not comprehensive, but a dire indication that resolve or progress will not be possible if District Sixers do not initiate conversations about who we are or continue to perpetuate hierarchical, anthropocentric systems (see figures 20-22). This project intended to start these difficult conversations through a collaborative art project that draws on the tools and thinking that socially engaged art, new materialism and object orientated ontology offer in the interests of improved community cohesion. This is discussed in the considerations that follow.

16 In a telephone call with an official in the South African National Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD), I was told that only those who had successful land claims in District Six are seen as District Sixers. This is a complicated position as the identity of a District Sixer is fundamentally connected to land ownership and nothing more by National Government.



Figure 21. District Six Civic Association. 2023. *Reclaim Silvertree Campaign*. [Digital Poster] Facebook.



Figure 22. Jordaan, M. 2022. *Makeshifts tents that were erected in District 6.* Photograph. News24.

PART 2:
Nothing about us, without us

Methodologies towards an engaged arts practice

The Tate's online glossary defines the art term *socially engaged practice* as describing any art form that uses visual art methodology and practices to involve people and communities in debate, collaboration or social interaction (Tate 2024). The participatory element is vital, with the artworks often holding equal or less importance than the collaborative act of creating them. The artists' aim could be to use art as a social mediator to assist a community in working towards a common goal, to identify and establish shared values, raise awareness and encourage communication around issues, or to improve their physical or psychological conditions.

The joy of making, a pedagogical impulse and a commitment to social justice are central to my practice (Valley 2019). The relationships I have established through art projects with neighbours, ex-residents and the newly returned of all ages, attitudes and aptitudes as individuals and as a community invested in learning since 2007, have been the greatest rewards of my work (see figures 23-24). Together with the very dynamic and invested staff of the District Six Museum, they are my teachers. This accountability within a community to learn more about our existence and purpose has honed my teaching and visual arts practice through the facilitation of open-ended ethical, challenging, collaborative and relevant arts projects that respond to the constituents' spatial and psychic needs. I have witnessed it having a sustainable impact and generating hope and joy. Bonita Bennett, director of the District Six Museum between 2008 and 2020 refers to the impact of this methodology on the museum's strong memory practice:

"I draw on the project plans to show that conceptualising, crafting and implementing actions collaboratively with the community that is the museum's most natural and closest constituency – in this case, the displaced people of District Six – can contribute to building community cohesion and psychosocial healing. The D6M initiatives discussed in this article demonstrate the powerful possibilities inherent in processes that work closely with memory keepers as co-curators rather than as source communities" (Bennett 2022).

Since I started working with the District Six Museum and its community of ex-residents and residents, participants have requested of me to do a clay project. Most fondly, residents recall collecting clay from the *clay-huweltjies* or clay mounds on the upper slopes of District Six or working with clay in their early (or only) years of schooling.



Figure 23. Dunjwa, R. 2023. District Sixers excited at seeing the variations of pillowcases collected from each person's home. Land matter from the site was later collected and stored in these intimate items. Workshop photograph.



Figure 24. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Spontaneous singing and dancing during a workshop session. Workshop photograph.

Museum projects and programming are very demanding, and we continued longing for the day we could venture into ceramics while we painted murals, designed steel sculptures, curated photographic displays, planned performances with wearable art and created site-specific installations.

My decision to do my Masters was largely motivated by the idea of working with this inter-generational team of avid producers who strongly identified as District Sixers; to re-unite them with land matter and experiment with ideas of transformation, return and belonging. My Master of Fine Art research project aimed to involve participants, through workshops and interviews, and the planning of a well-considered showing and exhibition that deals with the impact of filling District Six up with people and infrastructure as a site rooted in the memory of loss.

The methodology of socially engaged art creates the imaginative arena and technical laboratory in which we can openly and safely discuss and act upon both forced removals and the return of people to the land as traumatic events of uprooting. This practice of shared authorship and creative civic action for social justice can be traced back from First Nation rock art palimpsests to Dada events to Documenta15 in 2022.[17]

17 The existing Indonesian artists' collective of Ruangrupa who curated Documenta 15 worked around the concept of 'Lumbung' translated as 'Rice Barn': a shared resource holding the bounty of labour and care by a community, bound by expectations and rules set by the community. " If artists work together, they can do more" (Documenta-fifteen 2022)

The legitimisation of this socio-political practice in the art world with its non-commodity status, awkward post-event representation and open-ended processes occurred largely at the end of the last century. In Claire Bishop's (2012:193) discussion around the 'ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions', Bishop problematises the conspicuous resurgence of participatory art in the 1990s from its position of being situated in both art history and a socio-political context. She marks the period from 1989 to the late nineties as the end of the Cold War, the collapse of welfare states and a period of global neoliberal reform that stimulated curators and artists to re-orientate their practices towards the social and relational; through open-ended, participatory art projects. The arrival of the participatory art project is seen in relation to the retreat of the social welfare project and the lack of global collective political will in the northern hemisphere.

This very period in South Africa's history marks the collapse of Apartheid and the transition to democracy. It also signifies the approach of globalisation and the end of the cultural boycott, with South Africa re-entering the international arts arena; thereby introducing the local arts scene to a new realm of global thinking strongly concerned with justice-driven politics, influenced increasingly by post-colonial theories (Minty 2011).

"The interest in the new international discourse around identity, site-specificity, the relational and new genre public art found roots here then; with local artists, institutions and government recognising its potential as an ally in social transformation, symbolic redress and urban renewal" (Minty 2011:165).[18]

18 In 1991 Suzanne Lacy defined the transient processes of interaction between participants in a defined locality and the artists as "new genre public art" as being activist, often created outside the institutional bringing direct engagement with the audience, while addressing social and political issues (1995:12-13).

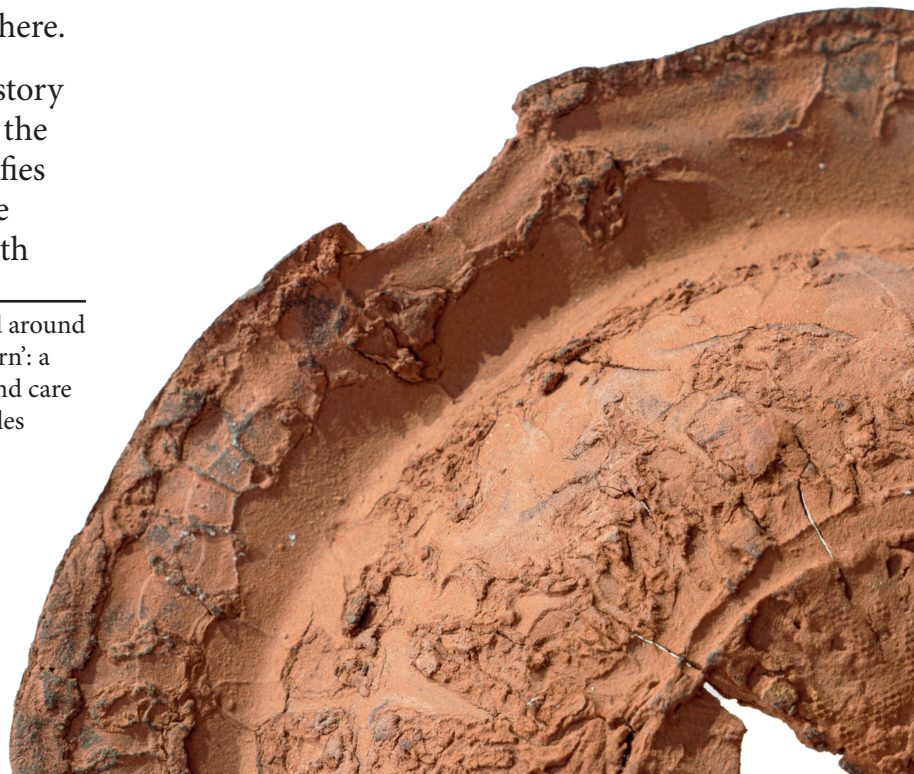


Figure 25. Ayesha Price. 2022. *Service*. Fired District Six clay.

PART 2: Nothing about us, without us

Methodologies towards an engaged arts practice



Figure 26. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Experiments with found objects and clay. Workshop photograph.



Figure 27. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Participants examine the first batch of kiln-fired ceramics. Workshop photograph.

Most recently, the collective approach to curating with attention to social justice at the 35th Sao Paolo Biennale 'Choreographies of the Impossible' in 2023, affirms the improved generative power to conceptualise and produce critically and creatively within a lateral structure.

The curators worked with the idea of 'choreography' referring to the experimentative drawing of sequences of movements of bodies across time and space to describe, explore and develop art practice, artworks and exhibitions while working with consultants and artists to negotiate the 'impossible' or unknown, a stark contrast to previous biennales in which the entire showing revolved around the vision of a single, all-powerful curator.[19] This careful choreography between many stakeholders or 'shared authorship in collaborations' is defined by Suzanne Lacy, founder of new genre public art (Kwon:106), as integral to socially engaged art, while Tom Finkelpearl, former Commissioner of the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, shapes social practice in art as "art that's socially engaged, where the social interaction is at some level the art" (Tate 2024).

District Six was fondly known as Kanaladorp, with *kanala* as a Malay word meaning 'help one another' (Bickford-Smith 1990:36). Arts and creative practice was almost always one of collaboration. From *Kaapse Klopse* (Cape Minstrels) productions and performances which consisted of well-considered colour palettes,[20] costume design, sculpture and site installations, inventive musical arrangements and choreographed performances to the Emancipation Day celebrations by Lydia Williams (Camissamuseum 2023), a 'freed slave' who would gather local children to create paper and candy installations around her home and thereafter offer a feast to the community.



Figure 28. Dunjwa, R. 2023. First experiments with clay at the District Six Homecoming Centre, District Six Museum. Workshop photograph.

19 From recorded discussion with Michaelis post graduate students and Helio Menezes, one of the four curators of the 35th Sao Paolo Biennale, titled 'Choreographies of the Impossible'. 6 December 2023, Sao Paolo.

20 'Strikkies' or scraps and strips of cloth from annual costumes would be hung across streets from lampposts to announce the selected colour combinations for individual teams for New Year festivities. They are a marker of location and identity.



Figure 29. Dunjwa, R. 2023. First experiments with clay at the District Six Homecoming Centre, District Six Museum. Workshop photograph.



Figure 30. Dunjwa, R. 2023. First contact with clay at the District Six Homecoming Centre, District Six Museum. Workshop photograph.



Figure 31. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Workshop at the District Six Homecoming Centre, District Six Museum. Workshop photograph.



Figure 32. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Workshop at the St. Phillips Church Hall in Chapel Street, District Six. Workshop photograph.

The gathering together of people, to pool resources and share skills to create an event that is openly and freely shared with the larger public with the intention of creating social cohesion is the approach I take in my work.

My intimate relationships with District Sixers have stood the test of time and have resulted in people repeatedly attending and volunteering for visual arts projects and workshops, developing their skills and gaining experience in collaborative, multi-authored practices that acknowledge them as experts in their own lived experiences.

Workshops were held at the District Six Museum and the St Phillips Church Hall in Chapel Street in District Six, with approximately forty people attending each session. People came from Mitchell's Plain, Belhar, Heideveldt, Gugulethu, Lavender Hill, Factreton, Phillipi, Salt River, Walmer Estate, Kenwyn, Pelican Park and District Six. Ages ranged from five years old to seventy-five. Stories about District Six life and life on the Cape Flats were shared each morning over coffee, prompted by the commute into town. This social ritual of sharing refreshments and regaling tales before we started the day in earnest and the spontaneous musical interludes of sing-alongs with piano accompaniment developed a sense of trust and belonging as we at once remembered collectively and created new joyous memories (see figures 23-24, 26-32). The atmosphere was always receptive with all collaborators, old and new, ready to learn, teach and engage sensitively. Moments of pain or sadness were treated with great tenderness and the preparedness to listen. This was especially evident when issues of current living conditions, belonging to and restitution were discussed.

Participants were continually encouraged to enjoy an intuitive relationship with the clay and to establish how they best related to its material qualities as it responded to their touch and body heat. The expectation was not to comment specifically on District Six issues or to find a solution to our problems, but rather to intuitively allow connections to happen when we come into contact with the material. Regardless of the subject matter or form produced, their self-affirmed identity and experiences as District Sixers were the source and reference point for their production. Whatever they produced was a valid comment on their lives and indicated a new awareness of their relations with earth matter.

PART 2: Nothing about us, without us

Methodologies towards an engaged arts practice

We often returned to Ingold's article, 'Materials against materiality' (2007:2) in which he professes that things are not agentic because they exist, but because of "ways in which they are caught up in these currents of the lifeworld." Like people and culture and positionality, the characteristics of materials are not fixed attributes but are processual and relational. In his words: "to describe these properties means telling their stories" (Ingold 2007:14). Continual reference was made to the exercise he requires of readers: to wet a stone and watch how the mediums of water, air and heat changed its material qualities over time. The 'stoniness' of the stone becomes more or less apparent depending on its circumstances at a particular point in time, depending on its involvement in its environment. It is more than its static attributes. It can best be described through its histories (Ingold 2007:15). From the moment of the encounter between participants (people and clay) both things started to change.

The rise in room temperature from people's bodies and excitement at seeing the clay and the tools waiting for them, affected the moisture levels of the sloppy clay now removed from their airtight containers before contact was even made. As the clay and people engaged in sensory encounters, completely absorbed in establishing relations. The clay demanded water or to be left alone or a specific kind of handling and respect; the people listened to it. There was little to no wastage as we collected and reconstituted bits of clay and dust to reconstitute the clay bodies.

The workshops were not about people gaining mastery over the substance but allowing the two 'things' to work together to ensure that both our vitalities and agencies were not compromised.

We later went on on-site walks and collected land matter in pillowcases and jars while mapping out memories of homes and lives lived amidst the rubble, overgrowth and remnants of streets (see figures 36-37). We looked for fragments and alluring things of vibrant matter that we shared or once shared a living, sensual ecosystem with. We imagined what the space would look like if it was not demolished and what it would be like once all the land was re-developed. Some found the approximate location of their homes or the homes of families, while others found the site of their favourite shops or hang-out spots. Some were completely disorientated at times, wondering how much more lost they would feel when the area was built up in the future.

Individual artworks became more daring as found objects and land matter became inserted into clay or when clay became a support and embraced stones, broken crockery or bits of metal (see figures 33-34). We looked at the evidence of histories by examining our treasures. We deliberated over the work I had produced on my own, my research and the intention of the project at large. At first, I experimented with the possibilities or extent to which the land matter, collected and categorised from different parts of the site, could transform from discarded, compacted rubble. Only after I had made several samples and small artworks did I begin to look very carefully at what they had been through and how their 'histories' (points of collections, material make-up, the circumstances that caused disintegration and then recreation, contact with and impact on the environment, etcetera) became more apparent through groupings and different methods of installation.

Workshop discussions turned to the inherent possibilities of representing our stories with land matter, things produced with land matter and the site as co-storytellers, alluding to shifts in meaning, circumstances and environments through force and choice.

This egalitarian approach of sharing agency with the environment and the things of our own making to present multi-authored narratives about connections and disconnections aligns with socially-engaged art and the new materialist movement.



Figure 33. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Treasures collected and connected with on a walk through District Six, by a workshop participant. Workshop photograph.



Figure 34. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Artwork produced in a workshop, incorporating found ceramic fragments, land matter and clay. Workshop photograph.



Figure 35. Ayesha Price. 2022. *Spice*. Earth matter.

In a related school of thought to New Materialism, Graham Harman proposes 'Object-orientated Ontologies' (2018) to also challenge human centrality in how we connect with the things of this world but focuses more on the encounter between things than Jane Bennett's *thinginess* of things which centres around the qualities of vibrant matter beyond human understanding (2010:20). Harman distinguishes sensual objects from real objects, the first being our perception of the object through our senses and the latter the object as it exists outside of human perception. Real objects can therefore be seen as the form of the object that imbues its agency and is withheld from our limited human capabilities. I can therefore meet you and we can connect on a physical level as matter or a thing that can be identified through sight, smell, sound or touch (the sensual object), but you will never get to know the full me as I experience myself (the real object). Therefore, real things can never touch or connect. But through the allure of the sensual and sensory experiences we can bring the interior life of other things into play (2018:127). He calls this brush with connection between two real objects vicarious causation: an effect experienced or realized through imaginative or empathetic participation in the experience of another (Harman 2007:220).

After our first kiln firing, the difference in material qualities between the plastic mud-like substance and the cohesive transformed glass-like substance and the different ways we could encounter earth matter across its phases of being astounded most. We spoke about how the act of meeting and getting to know the substance, moulding and shaping it into the forms it would allow and firing it into a molten state could be allegories for the sudden transformations we have experienced. We spoke about how the District Six land itself had transformed over a much slower time by seasons, years and decades by looking at aerial and landscape photographs from the Museum's archive pre- and post-forced removals. Bonita Bennett assesses the importance of remembering collectively and producing collaboratively in an open-ended manner in a previous project where I was the lead artist (Peninsula Maternity Hospital Memory Project):[21]

"Not only does this project make a large visual impact, but it has modelled a process of inclusive artmaking using public space. The process is substantially slower than if it were to be done by a single artist, but the sense of ownership and the personal investment experienced is priceless. These are the fruits of a patient-participatory process" (2022:144).

We started discussing how these small artworks would resonate in the vastness of an open landscape. We started thinking about how we would position these artworks on the site to represent the collective we had become while maintaining our individuality. We needed to maximise the allure of the installation we were producing, in parts and as a whole, to infer to it 'real' or having a life of its own. We did not aim to reach an immediate resolution, we needed to work without that pressure. We trusted in the process; that solutions would present themselves once we reviewed what we produced and started looking for indicators of meaning in them during the installation phase. This is discussed in the considerations that follow.

21 "Located in Caledon Street in District Six, PMH served the greater Cape Town area for 71 years, finally closing its doors in 1992 by which time most of District Six was destroyed. The building was repurposed for several years until 2015, when it was demolished to make way for a new community day hospital to serve the returning District Six community and the surrounding areas. D6M had been requested by the contracted developer to ensure that memorial traces of PMH's past were embedded into the new hospital space" (Bennett,2022:144).



Figure 36. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Participants on a site walk on the slopes of District Six. Workshop photograph.



Figure 37. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Participants on a site walk. Workshop photograph.

PART 3:
I am every stone in this place of stones

Site-specific installation: Considerations

The concepts and form of the exhibition intended to show collective intention and an inclusive process, representing a multitude of experiences as opposed to a dominant narrative. It alluded to the site and the artwork as collaborators, 'real' objects or things that have agency and an interior life. It created opportunities for the visitor to participate in the creation of meaning through an open-ended presentation that required the body to traverse the landscape to connect to the work.

We did not produce individual works on a grand scale, but rather small works that were easily handled and transported. Artists Antony Gormley, Ai Wei Wei and Christian Boltanski have served as references for the decisions made around the concerns of showing small-scale works in large spaces with increased fields of vision. Gormley's 'Asian Field' 2021 iteration, in which 200,000 hand-sized, hand moulded clay figurines were presented across the floor of a vast room in a gallery, denying the visitor entry, was created by individuals across three generations from the Xiangshan Village in Asia; bringing to the fore the co-production of meaning between viewer and viewed (see figure 38-39). The multiplicity of the figures, their diminutive scale, and their placement as a vast crowd looking up, created a quiet and expectant energy. The viewer is engaged from a single vantage point in the doorway in an act of looking and being looked at (Yao 2022:5).

Another artwork produced with community collaborators to create a floor-level amassing or unified whole representing collective effort and political commentary is 'Kui Hua Zi (Sunflower Seeds)' by Ai Wei Wei (see figure 41) (Lesso 2022). The sunflower seed metaphor arises from childhood memories of the artist. Using the memory of the seeds shared as gifts or treats in times of hardship to subvert propaganda posters featuring Communist leader Mao Zedong as the sun and the sunflowers who turn their faces to follow the sun as the citizens of the People's Republic of China. He explores how this tiny, humble object can reflect on the cost of human suffering brought about by totalitarian regimes as a symbol of poverty and conformity in this installation of millions of handmade porcelain seeds spread out across the floor of Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in 2010.

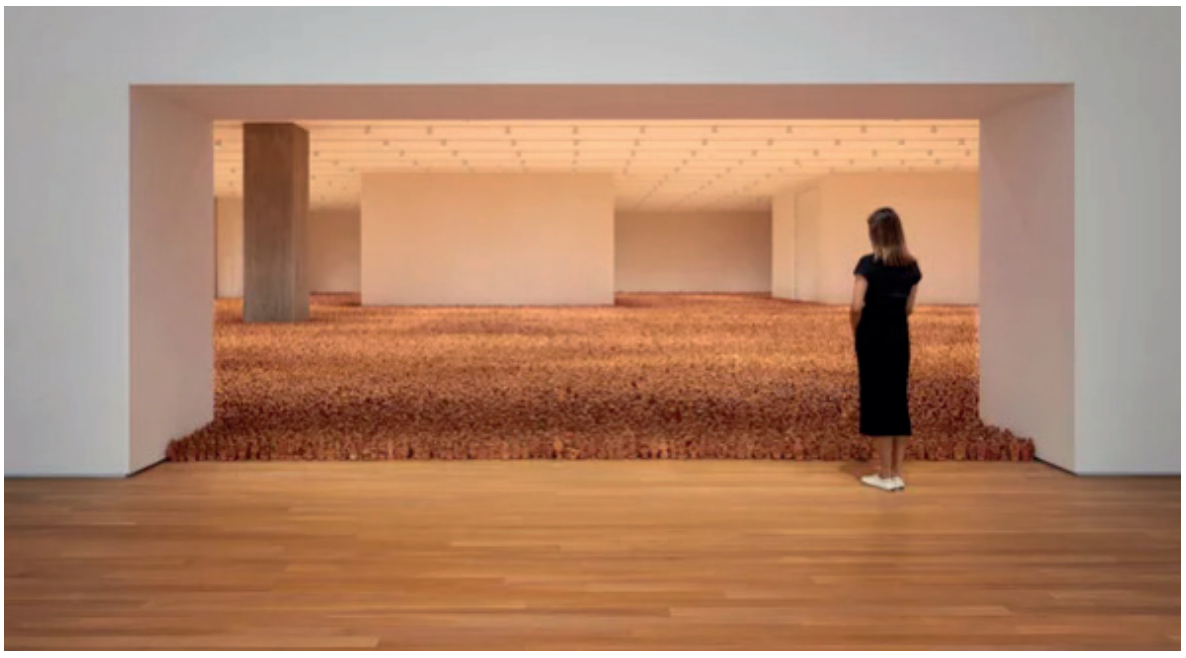


Figure 38. Gormley, A. 2021. *Asian Field*. Ceramic installation. M+ Gallery.



Figure 39. Gormley, A. 2021. *Asian Field*. Ceramic installation. M+ Gallery.



Figure 40. Ayesha Price. 2023. *We collect stones (detail)*. Compressed District Six earth matter.

PART 3: I am every stone in this place of stones

Site-specific installation: Considerations

Zyma Amien in her research into partisan strategies (2015) refers to this installation of millions of handmade porcelain seeds produced by 1,600 Chinese artisans. Her comment on the artist's decision to place this artwork underfoot and have the viewing public 'trample' over it was one of surprise at the decimation of the labour and care taken to produce the individual artworks. The installation set-up requires the viewer to disregard the labour force by prioritising the enjoyment of the pleasure of the seeds crunching underfoot, mirroring Western consumer behaviours that enjoy the product but are not concerned about the conditions of labour under which it was produced. This required the viewer to make an ethical choice in how they experienced the work.

People chose to walk over it until it was damaged, requiring the Tate to eventually reduce the interaction to a viewing opportunity due to the hazardous dust produced in its interactions with the public – an incidental metaphor for high risk working conditions (Campbell 2010).



Figure 41. Ai Weiwei. 2010. *Sunflower Seeds*. Ceramic installation. Tate Modern, Turbine Hall.

Both of these artworks speak to how interaction with the installation and its parts are designed to affect its impact and how the way in which we engage with an installation adds multitudes of relational layers of meaning to the work.

The interaction or participation required from the viewer in these installations in which power is cyclically transferred to the viewer, to the artwork and back again, is made dynamic due to the vantage points, proximity and levels of participation the installation allows the viewer.

Christian Boltanski's 'Animitas' is a video (Youtube 2018) of a display of bells perched on metal stems implanted into a vast and desolate Chilean desert-scape, creating a fantasy field which elevates the objects to eye level and relies on the wind in the environment to activate the installation (see figure 42).

Every bell ringing would release the wish or prayer for lost souls buried in the desert which was attached to the stem. This was an inspiration to place objects on rods to cajole the south-easterly wind that reaches gale force across District Six to become an activator and collaborator in our project. In his short video, he says that he decided to not preserve the work but left it in the desert as active shrines that only the desert itself would destroy, eventually. The bells would keep ringing, dispersing well wishes across the land as long as the environment allowed. It returned me to wondering about how long our site-specific installation would take to get broken down by our environment and how it would appear at different points in time. District Six as an inner-city suburb, unlike the isolated Atacama Desert in Chile with its human population of 64, has a far denser and more malevolent environment.

Karen Till (2012) defines 'wounded cities' as densely settled locales that have been harmed and structured by particular histories of physical destruction, displacement, and individual and social trauma resulting from state-perpetrated violence. In her focus on activism and art as place-based ethics of care practices in wounded cities, she identifies two site specific installations that can be seen as a socially engaged art practice that resonates with this project. She identifies Joseph Beuys's unification of artistic thinking with human action as having inspired



Figure 42. Boltanski, C. 2014. *Animas*. Video. Venice Biennale.



Figure 43. Mapa Teatro. 2002. *Prometheus, first act*. Site-specific installation and performance. El Cartucho, Bogota.



Figure 44. Mapa Teatro. 2002. *Prometheus, first act*. Site-specific installation and performance. El Cartucho, Bogota.

the protests and temporary exhibition that evolved into The Topography of Terror Foundation (Topographie 2023).[22] In these protests, artists and activists dug up the 'forgetful' overgrowth on the site of Gestapo headquarters, a site identified for redevelopment, to uncover artefacts and archaeological remains.[23] The excavated space and the display of the findings served as an exhibition that physically exposed the state's refusal to confront a shameful past "in an attempt to become a good democracy through economic recovery" (Till 2012:6).

The mobilisation of those affected by displacement to participate in art projects about their collective experiences can be a step towards healing and empowerment, becoming part of something far-reaching, while at the same time, quantifying reform through pressure from public movements. In 2002 and 2003, Mapa Teatro created *Prometheus, Act I & II* a performance-based installation on the site of forced removals in El Cartucho, Bogotá, which like District Six, was identified as a slum and razed for urban renewal (Mapa Teatro 2011).

22 The work Till refers to in particular is 'Zeige deine Wunde (Show your Wound)' 1974, an installation of two mortuary tables and medical equipment, bird skulls, pairs of agricultural and educational tools, and far-left newspapers. Beuys herewith commented on the injuries Germany inflicted on its citizens. His primary concern was "to make visible the death zone toward which today's society is rushing with great speed'" (pp.161-162).

23 In a local context, a site identified for redevelopment uncovering artefacts and remains, lead to public protests and exposed the state's desire to put the economy first. In 2003, construction workers in Prestwich, Green Point (Cape Town) unearthed the human remains of more than 2500 enslaved people and members of the colonial working class during the construction of the Rockwell, an upmarket apartment and office complex. At the time of the unearthing, Green Point known as District One (see figure 8) before the Group Areas Act and the forced removal of its residents, was the highest priced real estate in the country. Activists lead by the District Six Museum and the newly formed Prestwich Place Committee demanded that the bodies not be exhumed and that the site be memorialised. The Rockwell was completed due to existing rights to property and a memorial site and ossuary (Prestwich Memorial) was built close to the site as a compromise. Jonker and Till note, referring to the human remains: 'They… emerged as if to haunt the memorial foundations of the new nation'. They further remark on the current state of the memorial and exhibition in Prestwich Place which now operates as a coffee shop with the human remains stored out of site in cardboard boxes:' Much of the commentary read as a site museum for Green Point, rather than as a tribute to the people buried at Prestwich Place' (2009).

PART 3: I am every stone in this place of stones

Site-specific installation: Considerations



Figure 45. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Participants discussing soil and stones collected from their neighbourhoods and homes. Workshop photograph. St Phillips Church hall.



Figure 46. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Participants labelling soil and stones collected from their neighbourhoods and homes. Workshop photograph. St Phillips Church hall.

On this large open field, residents brought in furniture and performed amidst the ruin of their former ecosystem, surrounded by candles, projected videos and sounds of El Cartucho, which included on-site interviews with residents, historical images, maps, and scenes of the destruction that had taken place. In the process of physically reconstructing their memories and experiences through personal archives and performances on this site, residents laid claim to the rights of their city and moved closer to a state of belonging (Till 2012:5). They have not been compensated for their land which is now a public park, but their project was a way to return, to re-unite with the site of home on their terms for a short space in time.

It is very important for this project and for all collaborators that we occupied the site of District Six for the showing. As we carried the venerated earth matter away from the site in our pillowcases and jars, we promised to return it in its transformed state as an act of reparation and care. Participants also gathered soil and gravel from their Cape Flats homes and streets in jars to compare with the District Six earth matter, later to be displayed and strewn across the site as a symbol of return.

It was also crucial that the showing was a temporary one-off experience that could not be commodified or repeated, but that would function as a memory and a story, not something that could be owned and transferred for money. We would not sell our heritage. We would not sell land marked for restitution even in its transformed state.

The stories about how we pulled this exhibition off would develop over time and become an anchoring point of connectedness and will eventually become the only way we can access the collaborative artwork. We considered the idea of breaking and burying the artworks on the site after the exhibition where we hoped it could become part of the foundations of newly developed homes for returnees, creating new mythologies about solidarities and sharing in District Six.

We therefore needed to seize the opportunities at this particular position in time; while the wounded land took its last few breaths before being covered once again with shabby bricks, concrete, steel and glass; to make things right by making sense of the place we once called home and that we will feel at home in, in the future. By showing and sharing our art practice with the public and including them as participants in the event by requiring them to participate and belong through walking the site and engaging with the artworks was a ritual of goodwill for good fortune for the District Six community of the future.[24]

Together with the District Six Museum, it was decided to coincide the event of the site-specific installation with the museum's annual February 11 public program, which raises awareness of the day on which District Six was declared a White area under the Group Areas Act in 1966. Each year, the Museum:

"[February 11th] provides an opportunity to reflect on the legacy of this declaration and also to reaffirm the hope inherent in turning this day of trauma into one of hopefulness and recommitment. The rituals of remembrance that take place on this day also serve as reminders of the range of legacies existing within communities who were forced to forge a life together after they were displaced under racially defined laws. It also aims to draw attention to the unfinished business of land restitution, as well as the ongoing current displacement of people even as we inhabit the space of the new South Africa" (districtsix 2018).

24 This included strewing 'Suikerwater' or sugar water, a very popular home remedy for shock or trauma on the Cape Flats, onto the salted earth of District Six. I also recall my grandmother taking a bottle of sugar water to strew on the ground at places where people tripped or fell to appease the forces that caused the misfortune.



Figure 47. Ayesha Price. (2023). *Google Map overlaid with historical street map*.

PART 3: I am every stone in this place of stones

Site-specific installation: Considerations



Figure 48. Floris, H. 2024. *The site selected for the installation, Southwest*. Drone photograph. District Six.



Figure 49. Floris, H. 2024. *The site selected for the installation, Northeast*. Drone photograph. District Six.

CONCLUSION

This document contextualises my visual research and practice in my lived experiences and in the broader fields of research and visual arts praxis as an explication of the artwork produced in fulfilment of my Master of Fine Art degree. It serves to develop an approach or methodology for collaborative art projects that serve a social justice agenda within the sphere of socially engaged art and the philosophical thinking of new materialism and object orientated ontology as a basis for deeper research and a further honed collaborative art practice in the future.

In this project I drew attention to the reverberations of the systemic injustice of forced removals through time and space, in the context of District Six and the need for the affected to find non-threatening mediums or forums through which to commune and regain a sense of belonging to and with each other. Furthermore, I assert a post-humanist stance to motivate for the inclusion of non-human things to be included under the banner of District Six as victims of forced removal and as things of agency and single out earth matter and the land of District Six explicitly. In this document, I refer to all entities: material and relational, tangible and intangible, human and non-human, real and sensory; as things. This is done as an act of humility, not objectification, in my support for a world not dominated by human privilege at the expense of all the other things on this planet or this universe which are agentic, mostly beyond our comprehension. To equate oneself with things can elevate our regard for the agency of all things. To support this, I refer to the use of this term by Jane Bennet and Graham Harman as advocates for new materialism and object oriented ontology respectively.

This project also has provided me the opportunity to experiment with these ideas creatively, critically and collaboratively in a District Six community of care and learning, who appreciate my endeavours and are always so willing to participate and play with me. The perimeters of this degree have allowed for a limited number of collaborators and a limited time in which to work but has been nestled between other collaborative projects I am included in at the District Six Museum. This creates a continuum of projects that employ visual arts methodology as a mediator for social cohesion and serve the District Six diaspora, all of which will be highly influenced by this research in the future.

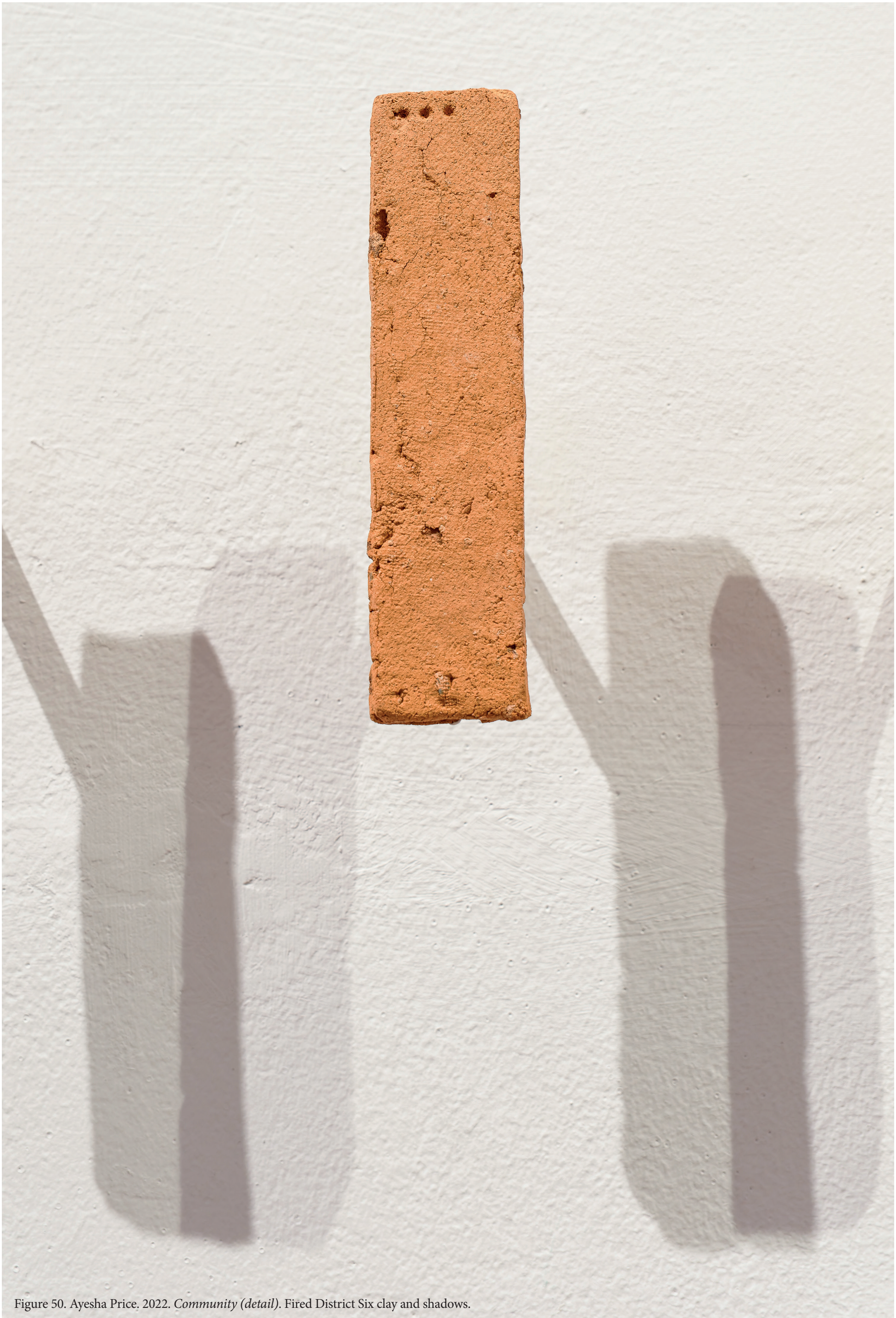


Figure 50. Ayesha Price. 2022. *Community (detail)*. Fired District Six clay and shadows.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Al Jazeera. 2022. Children play amidst lines of laundry drying out at Baqaa Camp in Jordan in 1969 [AP Photo]. 15th May. Available at: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/15/nakba-day-for-palestinians-not-just-an-historical-event (Accessed on 20 January 2024).

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5. Price, A. 2022. Fabric. Cement, plaster, fibre, earth matter and acrylics.

6. Price, A. 2022. Community. Fired District Six clay.

7. Map.1891. Map of Cape Town. At: National Libraries of South Africa. Street Directories.

8. Map. 1897. Plan of Cape Town, South Africa. At: National Libraries of South Africa. Street Directories.

9. Map. 1947. Group Areas City Bowl (detail). At: Information and Knowledge Management Department of the City of Cape Town.

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24. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Spontaneous singing and dancing during a workshop session. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

25. Price, A. 2022. Service. Fired District Six clay.

26. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Experiments with found objects and clay. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

27. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Participants examine the first batch of kiln-fired ceramics . [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

28. Dunjwa, R. 2023. First experiments with clay at the District Six Homecoming Centre, District Six Museum. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

29. Dunjwa, R. 2023. First experiments with clay at the District Six Homecoming Centre, District Six Museum. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

30. Dunjwa, R. 2023. First experiments with clay at the District Six Homecoming Centre, District Six Museum. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

31. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Workshop at the District Six Homecoming Centre, District Six Museum. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

32. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Workshop at the St. Phillips Church Hall in Chapel Street, District Six. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

33. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Workshop participants pause to take in the view on a site walk of District Six. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

34. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Group photograph of workshop participants on a site walk. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

35. Price, A. 2022. Spice. Earth matter.

36. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Treasures collected and connected with on a walk through District Six,

by a workshop participant. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

37. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Artwork produced in a workshop, incorporating found ceramic fragments, land matter and clay. [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

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46. Dunjwa, R. 2023. Participants labelling soil and stones collected from their neighbourhoods and homes . [Photograph] Workshop documentation. District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

47. Price, A. 2023. Google Map overlaid with historical street map.

48. Floris, H. 2024. The site selected for the installation, Southwest. [Drone photograph] District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

49. Floris, H. 2024. The site selected for the installation, Northeast. [Drone photograph] District Six, Cape Town. Collection: Ayesha Price.

50. Price, A. 2022. Community (detail). Fired District Six clay and shadows.

51. Price, A. 2022. We collect stones (detail). Fired District Six clay, cement and plaster.

52. Price, A. 2022. Fabric. Cement, plaster, fibre, earth matter and acrylics

53. Price, A. 2022. Return. Found metal objects, plaster and acrylic.

54. Price, A. 2024. Portraits of Districs Sixers (sketch). Digital Media.



Figure 51. Ayesha Price. 2022. *We collect stones (detail)*. Fired District Six clay, cement and plaster.



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Figure 52. Ayesha Price. 2022. *Fabric*. Cement, plaster, fibre, earth matter and acrylics.

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Figure 53. Ayesha Price. 2022. *Return*. Found metal objects, plaster and acrylic.





Figure 54. Ayesha Price. 2024. *Portraits of Districs Sixers (sketch).* Digital Media.

APPENDIX: Artworks

Master of Fine Art Dissertation

Ayesha Price

PRCAYE001

Title: We have lost one another

University of Cape Town

Supervisors: Stephané Huigen-Conradie & Jane Alexander

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for

Master of Fine Art degree.

2024

WE HAVE LOST

ONE ANOTHER



Ayesha Price
PRCAYE001

MFA Dissertation Appendix: Artwork
February 2024



Artworks

1. *Talking Walls*
Scaffolding, engineered to withstand gale force South-easterly winds. Erected with permits from the City of Cape Town and the National Government of South Africa. Digital prints of interview transcripts on Polyflag substrate

2. *Dreams (of District Six)*
Pillowcases from the homes of District Sixers, selected land matter collected by participants from District Six local, shadows, nylon washing line, brass curtain rail fixings and key rings suspended overhead between *Talking Walls*.
This installation was entirely curated by workshop members.

3. *Seeds*
Pit-fired and kiln-fired ceramic works produced by individual District Sixers in the workshop component of this project.
This installation was entirely curated by workshop members

4. *Generation (Contemporary youth struggles)*
HDMI cable suspended from *Talking walls*, found object (rope lasso with cinder block weight used in an attempt to steal St Phillip's church electric cables), pit filled with white building sand.

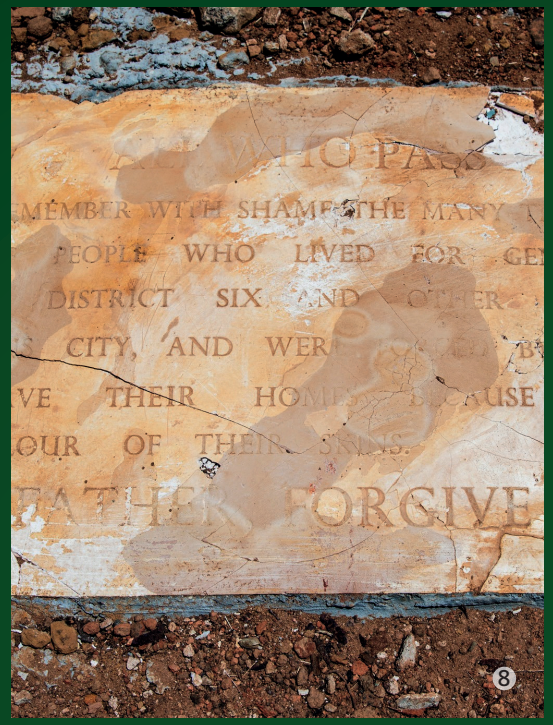
5. *Harvest*
Glass jars holding land matter and soil collected from the Cape Flats and District Six homes of District Sixers. Jars are labelled with the area of origin of their contents and planted in District Six soil on mild steel rods.

6. *Tafel*
Catering trestles, benches and tablecloths, memorial vessels produced by District Sixers in workshop series, terracotta bricks from site, sugar water, crystallised sugar chunks and copies of the dissertation.

7. *Pavilion*
   I. *Die wie nie gekry het nie, moet kry*. Concrete, plaster, District Six gravel and acrylics.
   II. *Pop*. Wood-fired District Six clay.
   III. *Fabric*. Cement, plaster, acrylics.
   IV. *Return*. Found metal objects, plaster and acrylics.
   V. *Community*. Kiln-fired ceramic samples from District Six, shadows.
   VI. *We collect stones*. Relief work in cement, stone, District Six clay with acrylics. Stones collected by artist and assailant. Security footage of stone throwing by assailant.
   VII. *Ode to artisans*. Cretestone, rags, cement, vilene, District Six gravel, acrylics.
   VIII. *I am every stone in this place of stones*. District Six clay, commercial clay, trilobites, found earth matter.

8. *Father, forgive us*
Found object (iron fireplace found on the site by my father post District Six demolition), cement and plaster cast of the plaque outside the District Six Museum. Land matter and building detritus from the site.


7 VIII


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We have lost one another is located in the ontologies of things that are widely identified, contested or self-determined as belonging to contemporary District Six in Cape Town, South Africa; a site of ongoing loss through settler colonialism, forced removals and now restitution. In this pivotal time of return bodies and land once displaced reunite, this project focussed on the fissure between subjects, objects and relations (things) as District Six enters the phase of reparation, redevelopment, commodification and private ownership. As a current resident of District Six, the artist collaborated with human and non-human components of the ruptured District Six ecosystem to facilitate a site-specific installation that recognised people and land as equal actants in the struggle for social cohesion and social justice.

- Who belongs in and to District Six now that it enters the phase of private ownership?
- How do the memory, concept or projection of District Six before displacement and the reality of an inhabited District Six impact upon each other?
- What is the future for District Six?

Contributing Photographers: Hafeez Floris, Diana Vives, Ragmah Miang Maclean, Muneeb Dalwai, Nicole Fraser, Ference Isaacs, Heather Jackson.













