

SPECULATING AFTER THE INTERREGNUM:
UTOPIA AND APOCALYPSE IN CAPE TOWN

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CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION: SPECULATIVE DISCOURSE

“The problem of realism is that it does not catch the full richness of reality”—Ben Okri.

In Nadine Gordimer’s influential essay “Living in Interregnum”, she places the locus of “revolutionary change” attempting to dismantle the apartheid system in the city of Johannesburg. This, she says, was inevitable, “because there it reached its ultimate expression, open in the legalized land- and mineral- grabbing, open in the labor exploitation of indigenous peoples, open in the constitutionalized, institutionalized racism that was concealed by the British under the pious notion of uplift” (Gordimer 1983). However, as a result of this conflict, or at least until it is resolved, South Africans live in the interregnum, a temporality of “cognitive estrangement” as per Darko Suvin. Yet even after the formal end of apartheid, its legacy is maintained in the socio-economic stratification it produced (Myambo). In Pumla Gqola’s words “we are both free and *not entirely free* of Apartheid” (Gqola 2). Furthermore, van der Vlies argues Gordimer still believed that long into the advent of South Africa’s democracy the constant, transformative struggle to redress Apartheid’s after-effects meant that South Africans continue to live in an “interregnum” (van der Vlies 4). The conditions of the interregnum and the transition that followed are reflected upon in various ways by South African writers. The Post-Transitional Literary Studies Symposium at the University of Johannesburg (in October 2009) developed an intellectual current for assessing South Africa’s temporality, shown by the debate generated by Thurman, Frenkel, Mackenzie and others. The significance of this debate was not to produce temporal stratifications in South African literature but instead to show how transitional experiences are represented, and therefore to conceptualise them since:

As a referent it cannot but highlight the passage of time that has passed since South Africa’s transition into a democracy, yet it also points to the period before and after this formal transition as an unbounded period and discourse. (Frenkel & Mackenzie 4)

Therefore, experiences of the interregnum, the transition and the post-transition after Apartheid are contingently present in each temporality. This allows for the assessment of the interregnum

alongside these other discourse markers. Speculative fiction is useful for its engagement with temporal dislocation and how this “makes strange” the citizens residing in South Africa’s cities. Therefore, these novels read the way that citizens of Cape Town are subject to the institutions that govern them within this spatial-temporal matrix. However, the city of Cape Town, as the primary setting for the novels in this dissertation, is also maintained as a site of Apartheid ideology in its continued racial stratification, maintained by an insidious combination of racism and classist spatialisation. As per Simone, “particular spaces are linked to specific identities, functions, lifestyles and properties so that the spaces of the city become legible for specific people at given places and times” (Simone 409). Cape Town’s historical position within British and Dutch colonial occupation as well as subsequent representations of Cape Town as a “liberal” city during Apartheid justifies a discussion of the relationship between the city’s history and its futurity. The representations within the novels I discuss produce differing modes of legibility for specific people at specific times, as shown by the nuanced use of temporality, from the historical interplay of Azure and Sarah Baartman in *Thirteen Cents*, to the liminal narrative within *Mermaid Fillet* and finally to the iterative narrative structure within *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way*. Each of these novels grapple with a specific kind of legacy left to the citizens of Cape Town as a result of Apartheid’s racialised spatial planning, and as such I use these novels to offer insights into the temporalities of the post-Apartheid moment. This is done by engaging the speculative form and its response to city-life in the new democracy.

Therefore, I address the representation of Cape Town as simultaneously an Apartheid *and* Post-Apartheid city within the novels of *Thirteen Cents* (2001), *Mermaid Fillet* (2020) and *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way* (2022). This is because Cape Town can be interrogated as a liminal space, a space of contradictions, where representations of apocalypse and utopia can exist side by side.

NEOLIBERALISM IN CAPE TOWN:

In addressing the city of Cape Town, I draw on Bickford-Smith’s characterisation of Cape Town in the tourist’s imagination as it succinctly delineates the material reality of Cape Town and its residents against its branded representation. Bickford-Smith argues that the construction of the Waterfront, Canal Walk, and the Cape Town International Convention Centre showcased the growing tendency for “neo-liberal economic orthodoxy” to “refashion the city” into a “caricature of a post-industrial city of the North”, evidenced by these “private-public development partnerships” and an “employment structure dominated by low-paying service

jobs” (Bickford-Smith 1777), a material analysis consonant with previous engagements with neoliberalism represented here by Van Der Vlies. He argues further that these developments were in stark contrast to the inequitable distribution of wealth that still existed along the “faultlines of race”, and showed how this contributed towards attempts at privatising public spaces due to affluent middle-class Capetonians fear of crime (Bickford-Smith 1777). This is read in conjunction with the City of Cape Town’s neoliberal policies as developed between the early 2000s and into the contemporary moment. These policy documents as well as legislative texts are examined by Macdonald and Smith as they represent the self-perpetuating ideological loop expressed by senior policymakers within the City of Cape Town (Macdonald & Smith 1466). Macdonald and Smith argue that non-neoliberal policy alternatives are ignored, as shown by their interviews with senior government decision-makers. The consensus drawn by Macdonald and Smith supports Bickford-Smith’s assessment, especially in regards to the development of private-public partnerships typical of neoliberal orthodoxy, shown by a concomitant decrease of intergovernmental transfers (from national to local) and an increase in foreign direct investment towards local government, as facilitated by the formation of Municipal Infrastructure Investment Unit, whose aim was to “to encourage and optimise private-sector investment in local authority services” (Macdonald & Smith 1463). Additionally, by examining the Democratic Alliance’s (DA) election manifesto for the local government elections of December 2000, they demonstrate that the party explicitly hold a neoliberal conception of local governance and service delivery; that

virtually every service that municipalities are responsible for “lend themselves to variants of commercialisation, competitive outsourcing and privatisation”: “garbage and solid waste disposal, fire protection, emergency ambulance services, maintenance of parks and recreational amenities, public transport systems, certain social services and primary health care, certain planning and zoning functions, water and sanitation, and certain municipal management functions. (Macdonald and Smith 1473)

Furthermore, this expression of neoliberalism is examined by Brown-Luthango, showcasing how it impacts urban development and regeneration. Brown-Luthango relies on a specific formulation of neoliberalism that “impels rather than reduces state action as public resources continue to be put in the service of assisting capital, but in new ways” (5). Brown-Luthango argues that despite its ostensible aim at alleviating social ills, the city of Cape Town’s neoliberal practices of spatial transformation are expressed via safety and security and not via a holistic

community based approach (17). This is because safety and security in this instance is a practice directed towards capital accumulation as a means of protecting property and not people. This is shown by the City's approach to Transit-oriented development (TOD), which is aimed at urban development via social and spatial restructuring through increased mobility. Brown-Luthango argues that this is characteristic of the City of Cape Town's expression of neoliberalism as only the areas marked as carrying economic potential receive the requisite "policing". Subsequently, mobility practised in this fashion amplifies suburban development as this reinforces the separation between the activities of work and leisure. These practices do nothing to alleviate the social ills of crime and violence that plague Cape Town, which are significant mediators of life in Cape Town indicated by its infamous position atop crime rankings. There are many other examinations of Cape Town's inherent structural inequality, and I draw on speculative representations of the city as an opportunity to engage significant critiques of this structural violence. These three approaches diagnosing the relationship between practices of neo-liberalism and the urban form of Cape Town are useful for my reading of the novels as each novel amplifies an aspect of this orthodoxy and how the subjects of these novels navigate this mediation.

SPECULATIVE FICTION IN CAPE TOWN: LITERATURE REVIEW:

The emergence of speculative fiction as credible genre in South Africa post-apartheid is in line with developing trends observed more generally across other forms. Rita Barnard's assessment in "Rewriting the Nation", observes that certain tropes such as "the archive, the palimpsest and the excavation" have been deployed towards "the retrieval and revelation of what is latent and repressed" within South African Writing (Barnard 657). Despite the prevalence of these devices, in which Barnard observes that "South African writers have insistently revisited the loci of memory – sites where the legacy of the past can still be traced", the emergent forms of South African literature post-transition have also emphasised *newness* (Barnard 657-664). This is reflected by the Post-Transitional Symposium for Literary Studies, as well as Frenkel's work on the palimpsest in South Africa's literature. This is not to say that the forms have not existed *before*, but rather marks an attempt to characterize South African literary forms "by an opening of literary form, style and concern", in which genre concerns are blurred, reworked, and rewritten (Frenkel and Mackenzie 7). However, Van Der Vlies has also observed that much of South African writing can also be characterised by a disillusioned, disappointed affect, as shall be examined later. These ideas are consonant with the development of speculative fiction in South Africa, as indicated by Rowan Roux's doctoral thesis "Post-apartheid Speculative

Fiction and the South African City”, who analyses speculative representations of Johannesburg and Cape Town. He observes similar tropes that I identify for discussion here, yet my examination of apocalypse differs in the extension of its formal aspects towards the rewriting and reconfiguring of the city space. Roux’s thesis is a useful platform for the articulation of speculative fiction’s generic concerns within a South African context, in which he analyses how the genre imagines “alternative ways of being” in South Africa’s city-spaces post-Apartheid (Roux 7). In this regard, Lauren Beukes’ key texts *Moxyland* and *Zoo City* are deployed generously as they participate in contemporary discourse of South Africa’s cultural imaginary, especially since Roux argues that Beukes uses the genre to represent Cape Town and Johannesburg as distinctly “literary” cities (Roux 41). Roux also charts more general engagements with speculative fiction in South Africa, drawing on a wealth of critical and creative responses. While Roux observes how speculative fiction novels set in city-spaces in South Africa articulates alternative ways of being, shown by his analysis of animalism in both *Thirteen Cents* and *Zoo City*, my analysis showcases the reciprocal relationship between the novel and the city, where the city participates in the writing of the novel, and where the novel reconfigures and rewrites the city. As such, I survey here literature that supports my examination of tropes of apocalypse and utopia in *Thirteen Cents* (2001), *Mermaid Fillet* (2020) and *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way* (2022).

I begin my analysis with a text that participates in the futurity of South African writing –Roux identifies this as a general characteristic of speculative fiction writing–and also excavates its past, by bridging the new and the old South Africa. *Thirteen Cents* follows the narration of Azure, a homeless boy living on the streets of Sea Point in Cape Town. The novel surveys intensely traumatic moments in Azure’s life, such as his proximity to violence and sexual exploitation, and can be read as disillusioned with “the New South Africa”, published as it was in 2001, which I argue engages the onset of neo-liberalism that Myambo characterises South Africa’s new political and economic climate. Azure’s desire of selfhood free from violence and economic precarity represent a particular dissolution of conventional good-life fantasies, mediated by the city’s history of apartheid spatial planning and urban engineering.

Thabo Tšehloane (2022) engages visions of utopia in K. Sello Duiker’s novels. This is achieved through focusing on the promise of utopian egalitarianism in Post-Apartheid South Africa and how this is mediated in the novel through its anti-social representations. Specifically, the essay treats the environmental apocalypse and Azure’s mountain sanctuary as liberatory.

Furthermore, the essay suggests that the novel is articulating a contradiction at the heart of capitalist modernity between its “promise of social redemption and the limited character of its realization”. My own examination of the text will use this platform from which to articulate a narrower focus on the relationship between capitalist modernity and Cape Town’s spatiality, using similar interpretative methodologies to Tšehloane’s essay, such as tropes of apocalypse and utopia.

In regards to my reading of the city, Anthony Vital (2016) envisages a “multidisciplinary conversation” between literature and urban studies, particularly in terms of each disciplines’ engagement with language and a global socio-economic order shaped by the construction of cities. The chapter reads *Thirteen Cents* for its complex relationship between nature and the city. Similarly, but with a narrower focus on water, Meg Samuelson (2022) examines the novel’s focalisation of water, both as a result of its association with security in a precarious urban environment as well as its usage as a sign that entangles “matter and meaning”. Therefore, this article is useful for articulating an ancillary discussion of a “disintegrated consciousness” as a result of Samuelson’s engagement with hydro-colonialism. Taking these two similar approaches together produces a generative discussion of *Thirteen Cents*’ construction of the literary qualities of Cape Town, and how literary studies can intersect with urban studies to critique the enduring Apartheid logic of Cape Town.

In contrast, Sam Raditlhalo in “A Victory of Sorts, All *Thirteen Cents* and *Bitter*, Too” (2010) juxtaposes the idealism inherent with the post-Apartheid project (as evidenced by a widely admired constitution), with the disillusionment of the new generation of South African writers inaugurated by Duiker. This is evidenced by the article’s examination of the gruesome violence that Azure is subjected to, and as such is useful for my own research in providing an informed discussion of the disjuncture between South Africa’s constitutional democracy and the violence plaguing the social order.

Mermaid Fillet presents a counterpoint to the development of my argument given the ways in which the trope of apocalypse is represented differently compared to the other novels examined here. *Mermaid Fillet* is a noir-crime novel set mostly in the Northern Suburbs of Cape Town (in contrast to the geographic setting of the other novels reviewed here). It is focalised by an extensive cast of main characters examining the relationship between identity, trauma and desire. This relationship is accentuated through a world in which mermaids have been cast into

existence by a “full menstrual storm” that breaks “the lining of the sky”, a speculative cleansing of the violence South African men commit against women. The plot follows the retrieval of a lost item imbued with personal and financial significance, and much of the narrative is mediated by the symbolic significance of “mermaids” and a narrator called the “Goddess”.

I aim to read the storm of menstrual blood raining down on the city as an apocalypse-like event that highlights the inherent inequalities of Cape Town, as opposed to the form of a *tabula rasa* as found in *Thirteen Cents*. There are limited academic texts on this novel, and none that treat the novel’s central conceit as apocalyptic. Stuit argues that the novel examines a “world of structural division” and provides a nuanced comparison of an “other Cape Town”, where “every Bellville has a Bellville South, every Rondebosch has an Athlone, every Maitland has a Kensington”. This is not to suggest that the novel perpetuates a marginalisation or an exoticisation of low-income neighbourhoods in Cape Town, but instead to realign a reader’s perspective away from stereotypical representations of Cape Town as depicted on tourist postcards. Stuit pays careful attention to the ways the novel addresses violence against women, yet stops short of calling the storm apocalyptic, even though the language used has formal similarities to other representations of apocalypse (particularly *Thirteen Cents*). This is shown in this passage here:

on those who hurt women, unleashing graphically described menstrual storms (yes, you are reading this right) that “drown the more vicious and notorious predators. Because in my wisdom, I saw fit to cleanse the trash and nourish the soil.” (Stuit n.p.)

Stuit is following the perspective of the “Goddess”, the narrator of this story, who exists in a kind of liminal space between the material setting of the novel and immaterial location of the text itself. In drawing on *Mermaid Fillet* and Stuit’s reading of the novel, I aim to make evident the problem of homogenous representations of Cape Town through the setting of *Mermaid Fillet*, by extending the usage of apocalypse as an analytical tool.

Furthermore, these approaches will form the basis of my examination of *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way*. Alistair Mackay’s novel alternates between a contemporary period resembling our own and a future climate dystopia where the Cape Town City Bowl is cut off from the rest of the country. *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way* concerns the fatalistic consequences of climate

change through its examination of entangled queer relationships in Cape Town. It moves between various temporalities, and most consistently situates the narrative in the post-apocalyptic “present” of the novel and the contemporary past resembling South Africa’s current environment. These novels are generative in critiquing the setting of Post-Apartheid South Africa through the implications of an environmental apocalypse. The tropes of apocalypse and utopia are useful for their explication of the relationship between space and temporality in these novels. This is achieved via their engagement in the novels with representations of space and time. This mediates familiar (and non-exhaustive) identity politics such as race, class, gender, and sexuality through the spatiality of the city. Luthando’s desire for meaningful environmental activism in *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way*, also represents the dissolution of conventional good-life fantasies, and is therefore read contrapuntally to *Thirteen Cents* for their incongruencies.

Mackay’s novel is the subject of McBride’s essay “Embodied Climate Knowledge in African Cli-Fi: Alistair Mackay’s *It Doesn’t Have to Be This Way* (2022) and Nnedi Okorafor’s *Noor* (2021)”, in which she addresses how the genre of speculative fiction can be used creatively in revealing “embodied accounts of subjectivity”. McBride achieves this through a formal focus on econarratology, in which she examines the devices present in the novel that in her view complicate “hegemonic accounts of futurity”. My approach will build further from McBride’s work as I aim to examine in more detail the tropes of apocalypse and utopia present in the novel, however, this will be aided with McBride’s narratological approach.

Given its very recent publication there has been limited academic material addressing it and its subject matter. As such, it presents an opportunity for original research in a promising critical intersection between literary studies, urban studies and ecocriticism. This will be done by examining the novel for its representation of the space of Cape Town as a material setting and as a symbol. Its deployment of images of the Castle, walls of fire, and simulated reality are all rich with symbolic potential mediated by Cape Town’s spatiality. I aim to show therefore how the tropes identified exemplify the cognitive estrangement typical of speculative fiction and negotiate the contemporary political economy of Cape Town.

In reading *Thirteen Cents*, *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way*, and *Mermaid Fillet* I engage a speculative reading of these novels that disorder the assembled racial logics of the city of Cape Town through these tropes. This will be done by paying attention to the spatiality of the city. I

draw on Jennifer Robinson's definition of spatiality, defined as "the ways in which cities assemble people, things, ideas, and resources, and distribute these within the city or set them in circulation again beyond the physical reaches of the city" (Robinson 117). *Thirteen Cents* and *Mermaid Fillet* utilize symbolic imagery and surreal narrative techniques typical of magical realism. By contrast, in *It Doesn't have to be this Way*, the novel deploys tropes characteristic of cyberpunk and corporate dystopia like bodily and cerebral augmentation as well as amplified class stratification. These ideas will be supported by Jameson's assessment of representations of Utopia in literature by engaging the fantasy of the "grand Utopian idea or wish—the abolition of property, the complementarity of desires, non-alienated labor, the equality of the sexes—is always conceived as a situation-specific resolution of a concrete historical dilemma". This examination of Utopia will be mediated by representations of various anti-Utopia's such as dystopia, which is generative for its insights into *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* as the novel can both be characterised as dystopic to the extent that it represents "apartheid-inspired corporate wasteland(s)" (Smith 345). While Smith's approach only appraises Lauren Beukes' *Moxyland* in this way, the two novels share generative spatial similarities allowing for their representation as dystopic to the extent that they reflect on neo-liberal hyper-capitalism and its drastic consequences on the natural world. However, Mackay's novel is useful for the way in which it frames the relativism inherent in any utopian project. To this end, its representation of dystopia will be contrasted with Azure's mountain sanctuary figured as utopic by Tšehloane.

RESEARCH QUESTION:

Suvin's "cognitive estrangement" is used to imply a "reflecting *of* but also *on* reality. It implies a creative approach tending toward a dynamic transformation rather than toward a static mirroring of the author's environment" (10). This changes the reader's engagement with the city of Cape Town and reflects a growing concern with neoliberalism and its affective consequences. This change is produced by the speculative form in which the reader's environment is represented as familiar and unfamiliar at the same time. The novels I analyse here represent the tropes of apocalypse and utopia simultaneously, and I unpack how this contradiction is resonant with the theoretical frameworks of "affective disappointment" and "cruel optimism". Therefore, I aim to examine the representational strategies identified above as they are deployed in the novels, and consequently how the city participates in the writing of the novel, and where the novel reconfigures and rewrites the city. *Thirteen Cents* and *It Doesn't*

Have To Be This Way occupy the same geographies of Cape Town but participate in rewriting the city in ways that are incongruent, a disjuncture that is generative for exploring. Moreover, I include *Mermaid Fillet* here to represent Cape Town's multiple geographies and how cognitive estrangement in this context is consequent of the hyperreal setting of the novel. As such, I endeavour to answer how speculative fiction mediates the city of Cape Town in the transitional moment post-Apartheid and into the contemporary moment.

ORDINARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SPECULATIVE AND THE SPECTACULAR:

Stephen Clingman's paradox of the interregnum "if a literature of the spectacle concerned a set of predetermined images and perspectives, then who in this era could see anything like the true nature of reality" showcases the virtue of speculative fiction in addressing the relationship between concepts of space and temporality (Clingman 634-635). Speculative fiction unpacks this paradox given the genre relies on tropes to produce a familiar affect. This engages Clingman's paradox given the novels' generic distinction from reality as both fictive and speculative. All three novels are grounded in the "real" of post-Apartheid South Africa, and mediated either through a temporal, spatial or symbolic disjuncture. Therefore, the form of speculative fiction showcases the contrasting nature of South Africa during the transition; in Frenkel and Mackenzie's formulation that there exists an exceptional fallacy in the post-transition discourse "that we were 'a world apart' under apartheid, and are now somehow equally remarkable, different, exceptional, because we emerged relatively unscathed from it" *and* that the "literature of post-transitional South Africa is newly invigorated, with a different relationship to the past, not cowed by tradition and what in the apartheid era drew respect (moral earnestness, political correctness and ethical high-mindedness), and willing to take risks (both ethically and formally)" (Frenkel & Mackenzie 3-4). This can also be complicated by Thurman's critique of the term "post-transition", arguing that despite legal separation from Apartheid through the advent of democracy supported by the new Constitution of South Africa, "[o]ngoing social, racial and economic divisions are evidence that even terms such as 'post-apartheid South Africa' are problematic", and therefore South Africa's socioeconomic climate is still in transition to "something else" (Thurman 91). Therefore, in engaging these novels, I explicate how the interregnum functions as an analytic for engaging practices of neoliberalism in South Africa post-apartheid; how these novels attempt to represent "something else".

In the literary period of the interregnum, discourse on speculative fiction typically referred to the novels *July's People* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, novels that engaged ideas around white complicity to structures of oppression (Roux). However, the novels of the “transition” (where I locate K Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents*), and the “post-transition” (*Mermaid Fillet* and *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way*) respond in some fashion to Ndebele’s challenge by “re-describing the ordinary”, moving away from the spectacle of structural violence of Apartheid’s totalitarian system and instead offer subjects whose interiority is mediated by a neoliberal responsabilization that produces their affective disappointment. Clingman in “Writing the Interregnum” enumerates the principles of this literary period in conjunction with the aesthetic project of Black South African literature advanced by esteemed academic Njabulo Ndebele. For Clingman, Ndebele’s approach established so-called “*formal* grounds” through which to access the “interiority” of South African writing (Clingman 633). I read speculative fiction novels set in Cape Town alongside theoretical frameworks provided by Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* and Andrew Van der Vlies’ “affective disappointment” to complicate the interiority of speculative fiction in Cape Town. This is because there is a reciprocal relationship between conceptions of space and practices of neoliberalism in the city and how this mediates representations of ordinary citizens found in the novels I discuss.

Post-Apartheid South African literature has developed in response to Ndebele’s principles to some extent. Ndebele was theorizing in response to the burden placed on the Black writer because of Apartheid’s domineering hegemony over the politics of Black South African aesthetics. As the promised end to the Apartheid era drew near—indicated by Ndebele’s belief as early as 1984 that Apartheid would end in his lifetime—he felt the need to enumerate a new set of Black aesthetics recovering representation of the ordinary alongside an implicit challenge to faithfully interrogate a new South Africa. This is typical of discourse during the interregnum because:

If, in these terms, the South African interregnum is defined as an era in which the nature, dynamic and future of South African reality became intrinsically problematic – in some sense invisible, present only as the shadowed and uncanny – then, by the same token, the literature of the interregnum was writing whose intrinsic form was to register that very loosening or unmooring, the problematics of reality itself. (Clingman 635)

Given the strong relationship between literature of the speculative, the spectacular, and the absurd—as they perform a mediation of the real in correlative ways—it can be theorised that its effectiveness as a literary form was diminished by the spectacle of the Apartheid system. However, as per Ben Okri, realism fails to capture the full richness of reality; the surreal, the speculative and the supernatural are precluded by the form of realism. Speculative fiction allows for a more nuanced engagement with the ordinary as it mediates the present through a negotiated future. This is significant in the context of South Africa where the concerns of futurity are represented in the preamble of the Constitution of 1996, as shown by its diction, associating words like “foundation” and “potential” through the prospect of equality delivered via a process of “transformation”. This begins a negotiated transitional temporality; in Clingman’s terms, a foundation for literature based in alternative modes of “apprehension”. In this case, South African literature post-Apartheid apprehends a dialectical interiority that liberates from the dominant enforcements of the real. As the political dissolves into the socio-economic, Ndebele’s “rediscovery of the ordinary” bears revisiting to the extent that the ordinary has a new set of principal concerns. Njabulo Ndebele’s theorisation occurs in 1984 providing a parallel approach to Gordimer’s engagement towards literature of the interregnum. Ndebele’s famous assertion “The history of Black South African literature has largely been the history of the representation of spectacle” is a significant touchstone for any examination of South African literature to follow. Ndebele grapples with Moyana’s thesis (“Problems of a Creative Writer in South Africa”) that life in South Africa is too fantastic and thus outstrips the creative imagination of the writer (Ndebele 143-144). In this regard, Moyana argues that Kafka himself would be outwitted by Lewis Nkosi’s tale of being arrested for no reason other than Nkosi’s race, and, when pressed, the policeman subsequently phoned his superior officer to determine what charge to lay against Nkosi (Ndebele 144). This is especially significant when examining the most famous works of speculative fiction in South Africa in the moment of its interregnum, *July’s People* by Nadine Gordimer and *Waiting for the Barbarians* by J.M. Coetzee. These two novels have been discussed ad nauseum, and represent engagements with white complicity during Apartheid, and also function as a sign for the concerns of the interregnum more broadly. However, these novels are clearly at odds with Ndebele’s theorisation of South African literature, given their preoccupation with “whiteness”, and so it becomes necessary to ask if speculative fiction post-Apartheid is at all consonant with Ndebele’s principle thesis. Should the literature of the speculative function as a mediation of the exterior; perform as a “method of displaying the culture of oppression to the utmost in bewilderment”, then clearly this form has failed Ndebele’s challenge (Ndebele 144). However,

where the strength of these novels lies is in their ability to recast the spectacle of violence that characterises contemporary South Africa. The novels recast the ordinariness of violence through their speculative and allegorical rendering of space in Cape Town. These representations are mediated by the interregnum as an analytic, framed by neoliberalism as a source of “affective disappointment”. Violence in contemporary South Africa has become almost numbing, and the speculative form challenges these representations of violence by placing them within the context of South Africa’s accommodations with neoliberalism post-Apartheid.

This is not a literature of the apathetic; instead it infuses its subjects with a vitality towards self-actualisation. Implicit in these characters’ navigation of the space of Cape Town is a belief that their subjective experience—their flourishing—is dependent on the unfettered expression of their practices of the everyday. However, as typical of the South African present, the novels are characterised by their “affective disappointment”. This affect, the formal emotional response generated by the text, is produced by the obstacle to the economic or societal flourishing the characters confront in the novel. Van der Vlies asserts that South African post 1994 provided an “accommodation with globalisation and neoliberalism...that correlates to global responses to post-Fordist precarity”, precarity defined here as a “shorthand for conditions of contingent labour (the under-employed, the working poor” (8), and similarly Moore observes that South Africa’s neoliberal characteristics begin with the “end of the Cold War and the concomitant and very visible rise of western capitalist democracy as virtually the *only* model on the planetary stage. This dual process has gone hand in hand with the phenomenon of globalization” (Moore 285). This threatens to overwhelm representation of the everyday as a result of the spectacle of consumption advanced by this epoch. However, by examining these novels within the framework provided by Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*, the values of everyday practice can be brought back into view. At the forefront of all of these novels is an engagement with economic security, and this bears out as a subjective experience only amplified by the form of speculative fiction.

AFFECTIVE DISAPPOINTMENT, CRUEL OPTIMISM:

The novels I read here ferment the location of the city with the ideas of Berlant’s cruel optimism to the extent that they represent the frayed fantasies of “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively durable intimacy” (Berlant 3). For this reason I engage Berlant’s text as a means for intervening in the interregnum, transition and post-transition represented by

speculative fiction in Cape Town. As such I use Berlant's term which is defined as an "attachment" that one may have towards "something you desire [that] is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (Berlant 1). Berlant argues that the conventions of a "good life" provided under liberal capitalism prior to the onset of neoliberalism have since begun to dissolve (i.e. before roughly 1990 but this is not a precise historicization; closer to an affective reference point) (Berlant 3). For Berlant, these fantasies can be located in a desire for institutional transformation, in individual subjective experiences such as romantic relationships and other forms of intimacy, as well a desire towards the "political itself". This intervention is useful as it is easily wedded to the conceptual and temporal shift observed in South Africa and the literature of speculative fiction given the coterminous temporality (post-1994 and into the culture of neoliberalism practiced as a response to inequality), as well as a conceptual shift towards a frayed system of representation. Each of the novels I address here represent a kind of cruel optimism, produced almost tautologically by the desire towards freedom facilitated by our transition from totalitarianism to democracy.

Andrew van Der Vlies provides an affective summary of contemporary South African Literature in the post-Apartheid moment, beginning with a close reading of Nadine Gordimer's final novel, *No Time Like the Present*. He argues that this registers "the experience of the postapartheid nation's decline from hopeful postcolonial state to run-of-the-mill developing country beset by the poisonous legacies of decades of strategic underdevelopment and blighted by corruption and short-sightedness" (Van Der Vlies). His argument registers the affect of contemporary South African novels as characterized by disappointment. It is precisely because of the advent of democracy and the formation of the Republic of South Africa and the dissolution of the political functions of Apartheid that "a hope for freedom was realized", and therefore that hope becomes "unconditionally disappointable because its orientation is futural, it can have no guarantee of success" (13). Van Der Vlies is drawing on the utopian philosophy of Ernst Bloch, who argues for the affect of disappointment as a condition essential and existential within hope. This affect is produced in the novels supplied here. However, the genre of speculative fiction resists totalizing narratives, as despite recognizing the imperfect present of the novel, they are figured in various ways as characterized either by hope or with liberatory potential. This shall be explicated in conjunction with the various readings of apocalypse and utopia I aim to employ.

I situate these novels within the broad framework of speculative fiction which encompasses a wide range of sub genres from magical realism to science fiction (Burnett). Darko Suvin originally defines science fiction (SF) as “a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author’s empirical environment” (Suvin 8). Burnett broadens this definition to examine how in the context of African Literature, texts that mediated and resisted colonial hegemony through differing imaginative frameworks such as magic and/or the “metaphors of science fiction” showcase the viability of speculative fiction on the continent. Additionally, Jameson argues that speculative fiction does not mediate our relationship to the future; rather, it uses the future to mediate our understanding of the present. For Jameson, the present is always unknowable in literature, as the act of representation always locates itself in the past. Whereas realism presents a hegemonic totality over the sum of its representations, speculative fictions insist on the plurality of its interpretations through the discovery of the symbolic. This is significant for my approach as these novels operate symbolically through the content of their representations as well as formally as genre fiction. Therefore, Cape Town is read as both a material setting as well as a symbol for a past that continues to mediate the present of its materiality. Allowing Cape Town to be read variously as material and symbolic facilitates the critical examination of apocalypse, utopia, or dystopia within the novels, and this reading is significant for the exploration of the cognitive estrangement produced within the subjects of the city of Cape Town.

Berger theorizes various representations of apocalypse in literature and film. Apocalypse is given various definitions: “After the end” (an oxymoron that signifies the chaos that lies in what cannot be represented-introduction xi); “a means of banishing, symbolically obliterating whatever... is unacceptable -xv”; linked to the obliteration of “historical trauma”, and I aim to compare these definitions with Fanon’s liberatory conception of the utopic potential in the disavowal of colonialism and its after-effects, as Fanon writes of the “*tabula rasa* which characterizes at the outset all decolonization”(35). I aim to pair Fanon’s *tabula rasa* with representations of apocalypse as liberatory. Berger examines three representations of apocalypse: 1) “the actual imagined end of the world” that he calls “eschaton”, 2) “catastrophes that resemble the imagined final ending”- which Berger uses to historicize a temporality *before* and a temporality *after*, and 3) reading apocalypse as “*interpretive*” or “*explanatory*”. This third usage deploys apocalypse as a kind of revelation, where the apocalypse, in Berger’s words, “must in its destructive moment clarify and illuminate the true nature of what has been

brought to an end.” As a consequence of this theorisation, I develop the term “narrative apocalypse” to describe how the novel effectively terminates the structure of the narrative (bringing it to a close) using apocalyptic imagery. This is significant because Berger argues that typically representations of apocalypse occur at the *beginning* of the narrative and not at the end (Berger 6). These definitions provide a method for examining competing representations of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic representations of Cape Town in the novels provided.

COMPARATIVE PATHS: OUTLINE AND METHODOLOGY

In this thesis my approach will be based on a comparative reading of the three novels I have selected. These three novels straddle the genre boundaries between magical realism, Cli-Fi, noir crime and speculative fiction more broadly. This comparative approach is useful for articulating the similarities and differences for these novels, located as they are within roughly the same geographies. This comparative approach aims to address my research question: how speculative fiction mediates the city of Cape Town in the transitional moment post-Apartheid and into the contemporary moment.

Chapter two uses *Thirteen Cents* and *Mermaid Fillet* to examine contrasting representations of Cape Town twenty years apart through the form of magical realism. I use the frameworks of Simone’s “People as Infrastructure” and Berlant’s “Cruel Optimism” to uncover the utility of speculative modes of representation, and in particular how the failure of representation through allegory enjoins Myambo’s critique of post-apartheid literature. I situate these novels within debates about neoliberal governance in the city in order to explicate its consequences for the post-Apartheid city.

Chapter three delves into an in-depth examination of apocalypse within the novels. It will examine various images that correspond with tropes of apocalypse, from Azure’s imaginative narration dismantling Cape Town, to the corresponding privatisation of space in *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way* in response to environmental apocalypse, and finally how apocalypse can be used to address legacies of violence and trauma in *Mermaid Fillet*. In this regard, I will examine how apocalypse rendered imaginatively is read as both liberatory through the language of Fanon and contradictorily as typical of the affect of disillusionment that characterises contemporary South African literature. This will be supported by Robinson’s

method for reading space in which I will examine how the character's in the novels are circulated around the city in response to apocalyptic tropes, as this will indicate something about Cape Town's relationship with race and class. This is done in order to showcase apocalypse as a trope that is deployed in response to practices of neoliberalism in the city.

Chapter four examines how utopia is used to mediate spatial conceptions of Cape Town as defined by its entanglement with dystopic corporate homogeneity, a correlative but inverse response to neoliberalism (in contrast with apocalypse). There are competing usages of utopia in *Thirteen Cents* compared to the other novels, as Azure seeks sanctuary in Table Mountain in order to escape the dystopia of the city space he lives in. Figuring the mountain sanctuary as utopic follows Tšehloane's reading of *Thirteen Cents*, and this is useful for my argument as it is positioned against the relative use of utopia/dystopia as a response to the onset of neo-liberal orthodoxy critiqued in *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way*. This wasteland will be examined through the lens of utopia/dystopia for the way that this disassembles the spatial logic of Cape Town as well as the privatisation of space and infrastructure in *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way*. This examination of the utility of the form of utopia/dystopia will be contrasted with *Thirteen Cents* for their differing representations of Cape Town. I aim to show how the privatisation of space produced in the novels is emblematic of the onset of neo-liberal politics that followed South Africa's transition to democracy post 1994 that marks the development of the same physical spaces as simultaneously utopic and dystopic.

CHAPTER 2:

READING THIRTEEN CENTS AND MERMAID

FILLET: A TALE OF TWO CITIES

INTRODUCTION: CONCEPTUAL BEGINNINGS

I use Simone's conceptualisation of "people as infrastructure" to support my reading of *Thirteen Cents* and *Mermaid Fillet*. Simone observes that African Cities are characterised by "intersections of residents that operate without clearly delineated notions of how the city is to be inhabited and used" (Simone 407). He argues that:

a specific economy of perception and collaborative practice is constituted through the capacity of individual actors to circulate across and become familiar with a broad range of spatial, residential, economic, and transactional positions. (Simone 408)

This is useful for my examination of the texts as Simone observes that this is a response to the manner in which residents are "marginalised from and immiserated by urban life", which is a thematic concern that links the two novels aside from their shared geography and form (as both are set in Cape Town and deploy tropes of magical realism that mediate our understanding of the city).

This chapter will focus on *Thirteen Cents* and *Mermaid Fillet*. *Thirteen Cents* uses public infrastructure as the setting of Azure's narration, residing by public swimming pools and under the unfinished Foreshore Freeway bridge. Furthermore, Azure's life navigates a network of actors, producing a precarious intersection of actors that constitute the kind of infrastructure theorized by Simone. The novel uses a surreal narration produced from Azure's first-person perspective, mediated by narcotics usage and lucid dreams to advance the narrative. These narrative techniques cohere to produce a speculative rendering of Cape Town. *Mermaid Fillet* complicates spatial imaginaries by representing areas of Cape Town marginalized by practices of neoliberalism. This is achieved by a palimpsest of narrative perspectives, from a cast of six characters, which is also understood as "multiperspectivity". The novel uses the trope of the

omniscient narrator to provide the reader with the subjectivities of its characters, via an omnipotent deity known as the Goddess. The Goddess changes the fabric of Cape Town by casting a storm of menstrual blood upon the city that is used to punish men for gender-based violence. The novel articulates Simone's concern for identity and its legibility in urban spaces, as shown by the Goddess' characterization of the city of Cape Town:

Every Bellville has a Bellville South, every Rondebosch has an Athlone, every Maitland has a Kensington. There are two Cape Towns. That's easy to forget. (Arderne 224)

As per Simone, "particular spaces are linked to specific identities, functions, lifestyles and properties so that the spaces of the city become legible for specific people at given places and times" (Simone 409). Cape Town's public infrastructure cannot be divorced from its historical circumstance as a colonial trading hub and then as a "liberal" apartheid city, and these novels read both the city's history and its futurity. Each of these novels grapple with a specific kind of legacy left to the citizens of Cape Town as a result of Apartheid's racialised spatial planning, and as such I use these novels to offer insights into the temporalities of the post-Apartheid moment. This is done by engaging the speculative form and its response to city-life in the new democracy.

Neoliberalism is understood here as an ideology towards economic and political action mediated by the free and celebrated process of capital accumulation. As per Brown-Luthango, neoliberalism "impels rather than reduces state action as public resources continue to be put in the service of assisting capital, but in new ways" (Brown-Luthango 5). *Mermaid Fillet's* complex narrative structure (an omniscient Goddess narrates the experience of six Capetonians) is juxtaposed against the single voice of Azure's first person narration. This intervenes against homogenous representations of Cape Town, yet both read Cape Town as a place inflected with the legacies of Apartheid, and allow for the examination of neoliberal orthodoxy within Cape Town post-transition. Instead of analysing specific actions of the State as represented in the novels, I analyse the proliferation of neoliberal attitudes present in the characters of the novels. The novels produce relations of "cruel optimism". This is because Cape Town is represented as a place of opportunity under neoliberal orthodoxy, yet by establishing the transgressive use of the city's infrastructure as directed towards narratives of neoliberal futurity, the novels can be characterised by the affective experience of "cruel optimism".

I situate these novels within the debate generated by Elleke Boehmer and Deborah Gaitskell, who in their special issue “Writing in Transition in South Africa” ask the question:

Can South African writers and artists be said fully to confront in their work the persisting collusions of postapartheid neo-liberalism and transnational capital?
(Boehmer and Gaitskell 726)

Melissa Myambo answers no (64). Following the formal end of Apartheid, the redistributive tenets of the Freedom Charter were discarded in favour of foreign capital interests for whom public ownership was anathema, “economic suicide” even (Myambo 70). This was paradoxically achieved through the ANC’s policy position of non-racialism post-1996. To sum up Myambo’s argument, the ANC’s non-racialism produced the multiculturalism that defines South Africa (and contributes towards its appeal to foreign capital) and foreclosed any possibility of radical economic transformation promised by the Freedom Charter. This matters because she argues that “postapartheid [sic] literature has launched a critique of the former and current governments by throwing light on the marginalized fringes of society”, however, in her view it is impossible to critique a “reactionary neoliberalism without criticizing a progressive multicultural democracy, because - for all intents and purposes - they have become one and the same” (Myambo 83). Therefore, Myambo produces equivalence between systems of neoliberal globalisation and South Africa’s multicultural democracy.

I argue that the novels approach neoliberalism side-on, subversively, as a spectre that haunts the characters, which is facilitated by the form of speculative fiction. This is shown by the comparative reading of the two novels, in which *Thirteen Cents* is used to explicate the immediate post-Apartheid temporality (published as it was in 2001), and this is compared against the representations of Cape Town in *Mermaid Fillet* twenty years later. *Thirteen Cents* is characterised by an ambiguous pessimism towards the New South African project, shown by its representation of Azure, a homeless child marginalised by the society he lives in, for whom radical transformation of the space he occupies is only possible through narrative apocalypse. “Narrative apocalypse” is a term I use to describe how the novel terminates the structure of the narrative through apocalyptic imagery. This is significant because Berger argues that typically representations of apocalypse occur at the *beginning* of the narrative and not at the end (Berger 6). Comparatively, *Mermaid Fillet* uses “multiperspectivity” to locate the subjective

experiences of Capetonians under its neoliberal paradigm, particularly in relation to pervasive ideas around economic security and identity, and how this is located within the cultural imagination of Cape Town. However, despite Myambo's pessimism towards the efficacy of literature in confronting neoliberalism, the novels I examine here produce critiques of its value system, through allegory. The comparative reading I provide of the two novel's is premised on the foundation provided by Berlant's *Cruel Optimism*. Berlant writes of the affective structure of cruel optimism:

attachment involves a sustaining inclination to return to the scene of fantasy that enable you to expect that *this* time, nearness to *this* thing will help you or a world to become different in just the right way. (Berlant 2)

Furthermore, the characters in the novels are marked by a shared understanding of their imagined community within the space of Cape Town. However, their relationship to the State's provision of public infrastructure and citizenship is complicated by this understanding. This provision of infrastructure is therefore a representation of the State at the level of urban form. This has a racialized history. Grappling with the legacy of Apartheid spatiality is necessary for any discussion of the representation of public infrastructure in the novels post-Apartheid. This is because of the enduring consequences of urban planning during Apartheid, such as a heavily unequal provision of public infrastructure, particularly in urban spaces. This was caused by the Apartheid model of racialized citizenship, as Lemanski observes "[c]ities were white citadels, with other races 'temporary sojourners' requiring permission to move outside their designated residential zone or rural 'homeland'" (Lemanski 593). Furthermore, one's "racial identity determined the legal right to own property, vote, and secure professional work, as well as to move freely" (Lemanski 593). Lemanski summarises her historical examination of apartheid by describing the "myth" of "urban apartheid"; that

[t]he apartheid city's reliance on cheap labour required high levels of black urbanisation that by the 1980s threatened the political system's precarious balance of power and highlighted the myth of urban apartheid. (Lemanski 594)

Lemanski explicates this myth of urban Apartheid in order to repudiate nebulous engagements with ideas around a "state" or "nation" and instead manifests the state as something concrete. This allows for a textual analysis of infrastructure in its various forms within the setting of the

novels. Significantly, Lemanski's model collapses the spectacle of the nation onto an expression of the ordinary through a citizen's daily access to public infrastructure. However, the State's regulation of public infrastructure is maintained by aggressive policing strategies (Samara 197). These strategies are usually at odds with daily expressions of ordinary citizenship. Therefore, to borrow Simone's language, deriving "maximal outcomes from a minimal set of elements" is the driving principle behind conceptualising people as infrastructure, where the conjunctions of daily life are a response to the marginalisation that residents of urban centres experience.

I address *Thirteen Cents* and *Mermaid Fillet* for their representation of the city as mediated by the genre of speculative fiction. Given the genre of speculative fiction is characterised by, among other things, a mutability of signs, this allows for a plurality of representations and therefore multiple and varied engagements and practices with urban form represented through public infrastructure. This is achieved through an allegorical reading strategy. Bainard Cowan offers this theoretical observation of allegory; that it is "[t]he affirmation of the existence of truth" and "it is the recognition of [its] absence" (Cowan 110). Therefore, allegory operates successfully through its instantiation of "failure" of representation. In the case of speculative fiction, its representational strategies offer an attempt to represent faithfully the "real" of its setting. This means that within the world that the texts create, the representational strategies deployed are conceived of as real to its world. Additionally, this world is represented as being familiar to the world of the reader, achieved by the novels' mediation of the real through representation. However, despite the familiarity, allegory is successful in its moment of departure from this representation of the real and therefore fails to capture authentically the subject of its representation. This failure is a formal intervention into the real and therefore mediates our understanding of the real. This is because the moment of departure is signified by its difference from the real, and therefore that difference estranges the reader from that familiar setting.

Thirteen Cents and *Mermaid Fillet* unmoor the reader from the reality of South Africa and specifically Cape Town, and this unmooring entangles the ordinary with the urban form of Cape Town. *Thirteen Cents* is located within the genre of magical realism, where the real of Azure's life is mediated by elements of the supernatural. Azure takes on a "measure of expendability" as he navigates his precarious position as a homeless child in Sea Point via a network of transgressive, bad faith actors. Additionally, the novel's setting under the failed

Foreshore freeway bridge further showcases the utility of allegorical modes of argument, particularly in the moment of its publication in the new democratic South Africa. I locate the novel within a genealogy of speculative fiction that is born out of the post-independence affect of countries on the African continent. The figure of the child is often deployed as a motif in postcolonial African literature, typically to explicate identity as plural within a dyadic world (Ouma 5). Azure's character beckons towards Azaro of *The Famished Road*, as these protagonists share similar concerns in terms of identity, economic security and tropes around masculinity. Furthermore, they are imbued with spiritual significance given both flit between the real of the novels' setting—in post-independent Nigeria and newly democratic South Africa—and a supernatural or dreamlike realm that mediates the characters engagement with the real. Where *Thirteen Cents* makes marginal its characters within the urban centre, *Mermaid Fillet* centers its cast from locales that are acknowledged as peripheral. The novel imagines a Cape Town defined by its institutional patriarchal violence (not so dissimilar from the real) but amplified by a storm of menstrual blood that drenched the city and provides for the allegorical framing of the novel. The allegory of the storm inserts a transformative symbolic lens on the function of violence within Cape Town, and exploring this representation offers generative insights into the fabric of the city. The novel uses the speculative form of magical realism to enact revenge on men for their violence against women. The novel similarly relies on an understanding of people as a kind of infrastructure for navigating the city and showcases how identity is then curated by these spaces.

PEOPLE AS INFRASTRUCTURE: NETWORKS IN *THIRTEEN CENTS*

Thirteen Cents is of seminal importance for a discussion of South African literature and literatures of the speculative as it is uniquely positioned within discourse surrounding “the transition” from Apartheid to democracy. Published in 2000, the city of Cape Town is represented through the first person narration of Azure. Azure is a child who turns thirteen years old over the duration of the narrative. The idea of transition is reinforced many times in the novel, represented by Azure's backstory (he moved from Joburg to Cape Town with his friend Vincent), his obsession with aging up into “manhood”, as well as mimetically through his dreamlike narrative. Furthermore, the narrative is situated within the temporal moment of “transition” in South Africa's political history (after South Africa's first democratic election and the promulgation of the new Constitution). Although no formal dates are given, the reader is situated in this temporality by the reference to PAGAD (People against Gangsterism and

Drugs), a vigilante group that were active from 1996 until 2000 (Samara 201). The city's provision of resources is divided based primarily on wealth, or more accurately, proximity to flows of capital accumulation (Samara 200). These resources are "secured" by an aggressive approach to safety and security that Samara argues is characteristic of Apartheid era police brutality. Samara argues that this creates two cities, a city imbricated in practices of the "world-city" as a place for tourists, conventioners, business people and affluent residents, and a city under a containment strategy reproducing Apartheid-era policing (Samara 200-201). This perpetuates cycles of violence as, according to Samara, aggressive policing does not address the root cause of social ills like gangsterism. Instead, it facilitates a hydra-like phenomenon where organised crime becomes decentralised (Samara 208).

Thirteen Cents complicates homogenous conceptions of Cape Town, as shown by Azure's navigation of Sea Point, which is directed towards surviving the city. Here he survives via the exploitation of his body by wealthy white men (instantiating a relationship between wealth and whiteness, as well as predation) (Duiker 15). Sea Point, located within the "city bowl", is typically characterized as a wealthy area, and therefore the novel destabilizes the binary logic produced by wealth and security through the embodied exploitation of Azure. Similarly, the novel invokes PAGAD to cast a disillusioned affect over the promise of a new prosperous South Africa (PAGAD and the consequent war on urban terror engaged by SAPS significantly altered the futurity of policing in South Africa according to Samara). This bifurcation is well-established by urban theorists such as Samara as well as McDonald and Smith. This means that the cultural imaginary of Cape Town is at once represented as a location of affluence constituted through an economics of leisure via tourism and other economic activities, and as a city defined by violence and inequality, and that this inequality is a product of the legacy of Apartheid spatiality (Samara 198). Furthermore, as shown by Samara's examination of policing in Cape Town, neoliberal governance contributes to further insecurity through aggressive, apartheid-inspired policing strategies that were entrenched in the moment of transition to democracy (Samara 198).

The novel employs a network of characters that facilitate an ersatz economy in the mode akin to Simone's "people as infrastructure". Gerald (the head gangster), Sealy (an associate of Gerald), Allen (a pimp), Liesel (the spaza shop attendant), Aunt Joyce (Azure's ersatz "bank") and Vincent (Azure's only friend) all function as nodal points for Azure to use (or be used by) within Sea Point and underneath the bridge where they live. This formulation of individuals

offers a route for conceiving of the novel's usage of space in a manner that closely follows Simone's theorisation. Each individual offers a collaborative practice as individuals marginalised from society given their residence under the bridge, a position observed to be unbound from the structures of law enforcement. Gerald offers "protection", enforced violently and ironically (Duiker 70). Allen functions as marketplace, for commodities and for people (22). Liezel and Ma Zakes spaza shop form a more conventional commercial gathering place, but also as a place of leisure (23). Joyce "secures" Azure's money on his behalf (17). Vincent "advises" for Azure, a political fixer/consultant (44). Simone's theorisation is beneficial here. He observes that networks of people that function to produce "life in the city" are "radically open, flexible and provisional" (Simone 408). In one moment, Allen is a "pimp" and the next he is a fence for stolen goods (Duiker 18-19). He supplies Azure with shoes and a reputation on the streets. However, he is no benevolent mentor. He threatens Azure, and behaves irrationally. Vincent observes that Allen wishes to be "white", and this explains his violent behaviour as whiteness is seen as hegemonic and totalizing, inflicted on others as something domineering (45). Vincent operates as a didactic fountain of wisdom helping Azure navigate Cape Town's violent streets. Vincent characterises the bridge as Gerald's "breathing space", his "castle", that allows him to operate his crime syndicate without interference from the police (73). The police's absence from this space is due to the mutually assured destruction that would befall both them and Gerald should they intervene, as Vincent explains to Azure. "This is South Africa, bra. The police were also in it. Times are shit. They also wanted a slice of the action... They want to eat as well. Streets are hard, hey. We give those assholes a tough time" (73).

In a similar vein to Allen, Gerald grants Azure protection after their conflict is resolved, yet holds a simmering grudge against Azure for his blue eyes, a mark of whiteness that Gerald will never have access to. Simone argues that "[p]eople as infrastructure" enables residents to

generate concrete acts and contexts of social collaboration inscribed with multiple identities rather than in overseeing and enforcing modulated transactions among discrete population groups. (Simone 419)

This is significant in the context of fictive representations of Cape Town as the novel offers concrete acts of life in the city, noting that relationships between people are unstable and uncertain. When life in the city is so imbricated in socio-economic marginalisation as someone like Azure experiences, it forces the need to "reconceptualize the notion of belonging in terms

other than those of a logic of group or territorial representation” (Simone 419). In the novel, this moment is supplied by Azure and Gerald’s conflict. Azure in a moment of drug-induced stupor confuses Gerald for Sealy (Duiker 25). Gerald lashes out in anger and enacts severe retribution on Azure, who suffers assault and sexual assault from Gerald and his gangsters (48-68). Gerald is assuaged only by the act of “belonging” Azure supplies, so that Gerald “owns” him (70). Azure then moves from his initial position close to the Sea Point swimming pool to the unfinished Foreshore Freeway bridge (70). These locations of the everyday (a public leisure area and a bridge for an unfinished motorway) are subverted by Azure and the rest of the community. The swimming pool shifts from a location of leisure to a location of security. The unfinished bridge, instead of facilitating citizens’ mobility, becomes an abode for rest and sustenance. Both of these subversions of public infrastructure are represented in the novel as *transgressive*. The unfinished bridge anticipates Judge Langa’s¹ speech on transformative constitutionalism, where he envisages the spirit of the Constitution as a bridge towards transforming the socio-economic circumstances of South Africa’s most vulnerable (Langa 352). Despite Langa describing transformative constitutionalism as a continual, on-going process, the unfinished bridge instead *enables* the perpetuation of violence given its representation as a haven for criminals. This metaphor is useful as an allegorical device allowing analytical intervention into the text, as the bridge in question is a hangover from Apartheid-era spatial planning, given the project was halted in 1977 (Laskow). Consequently, the bridge takes on additional layers of symbolism. It indicates a lack of faith in the project of the New South Africa, connoting a transitional project that is going “nowhere”. Furthermore, it serves as a physical reminder of Apartheid’s legacy of urban planning, memorializing South Africa’s foundation upon the previous regime. This is made possible within the world of the novel by the citizens’ insurgent occupation of the space under the bridge, forming an ersatz community run by Gerald’s gang. In Simone’s words, this would “parody a national or ethnic notion of belonging” (Simone 420). This community is not only represented in realist terms. Azure observes other homeless children “change shape” into “rats or pigeons” (Duiker 5-6). They form a network for passing information as well as narcotics (35). The speculative mode is therefore deployed to support the infrastructure of people within Gerald’s community, as they are his “eyes” in the city”.

¹ Judge Langa’s address was the Prestige Lecture delivered at Stellenbosch University on the 9th of October 2006, in which he enters the debate on the role of the Constitution and our country’s legal culture in transforming the socio-economic circumstances of South Africa’s citizens.

Much of the novel's speculative moments, such as Azure's observation of children transforming in animals, or his dreamlike trance atop the mountain, are inflected by Azure's usage of narcotics. However, these moments are also a medium for storytelling, as they advance the narrative closer towards its resolution, which is the narrative apocalypse, in which Azure wills on the destruction of Cape Town via a storm of biblical proportions (Duiker 191-194). This scene brings the novel to a close, and I analyse it more generatively in subsequent chapters. The moments where Azure's drug use mediate his narrative perspective also shift the perspective of reader, offering points of resolution within the novel. For example, in his trance atop Table Mountain, he meets Gerald, who has his lips sewn shut. This moment allows for Azure's vengeance to be accomplished, as Gerald is killed by a "T-Rex", which in the context of the novel is a symbol for power (148). When Azure returns to reality and to the streets of Cape Town, he learns that Gerald has died, ostensibly by suicide (160). The narrative suggests that Azure's trance affected the reality of his situation, shown by Sealy's statement, "no man would have cut himself up the way he was", and (referring to Azure) "[y]ou don't seem surprised" (161). This lends credence to the idea that the speculative form inheres within the novel in order to move the narrative forward, as this moment resolves the threat towards Azure's life, suggesting that Azure had a role to play in Gerald's death.

This consolidation of elements, of infrastructure as a tangible manifestation of the state and as a network of people that create a kind of fraught collaborative practice within the novel produces a relation of "cruel optimism" between Azure and the city of Cape Town. Cruel optimism, as above, is a relation between oneself and the object of one's desire that is conceived as an obstacle to one's flourishing. Azure's desire is a hegemonic masculinity aimed against his daily experience of fear brought upon by his socio-economic marginalisation, shown by his relationship with Gerald and his relationship to his own body. His conflict with Gerald is maintained by Azure's chafing against the gangster's hegemony on masculinity. Gerald refuses to let Azure be a "man" as Azure's masculinity can only ever be conceived as a threat to Gerald (Duiker 123). Azure's desire is represented as an obstacle to his own flourishing, as it incurs retribution from his oppressive environment. This reflects the novel's attitude towards the state of the New South Africa more generally. This is not an oblique, overt, allegorical critique of post-Apartheid South Africa, but reflects a subtle acknowledgement of Myambo's premise, that to critique neoliberalism inevitably critiques the new multicultural democracy. Azure is never protected by the state, who instead contribute to his precarity. Gerald's gangsters take Azure to the clinic for treatment after his beating, only for the healthcare workers to return him

to his assaulters (56). Given that Azure has only ever experienced trauma and hardship on the streets of Cape Town, he insists on the need for the city to be destroyed. This produces the allegorical mode within which the novel operates, as in the moment of its final representation, that representation is withheld. Therefore the speculative form produces an inherent ambiguity, as the novel offers apocalypse as the only suitable resolution to problem of neoliberalism.

CULTURAL IMAGINATION IN *MERMAID FILLET*: A FESTIVE PROBLEM

In *Mermaid Fillet*, the form of magical realism facilitates a mediated representation of the city of Cape Town. This representation showcases the extent to which the city is bifurcated both in terms of the material world and the cultural imagination of its citizen. *Mermaid Fillet* is narrated by the Goddess, who offers metacommentary through the novel's narrative structure. Each chapter is bookended by her perspective, a hermeneutic lens through which the subjectivity of Cape Town is mediated. Warnes argues that magical realism is a "mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural... in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural are coherently represented in a state of equivalence" (Warnes 3). Therefore, instantiating an omniscient Goddess as the narrator produces equivalence between the state of the real and the effects of her magic on Cape Town. The novel deploys the second person plural narrative technique when the Goddess is speaking, directly addressing the reader and the characters within the novel. By addressing the reader and the characters, the novel destabilises the separation between text and our contemporary moment. This allows for the novel to explicate the subjective experience of Cape Town, by offering a mouthpiece to express the collective consciousness of its residents. In so doing, the novel seeks to remind its readers of Cape Town's plurality. Stuit emphasizes the significance of this representational strategy as

In this world of structural division, where every city centre pushes its uncomfortable histories to the periphery, a Goddess rains blood on those who hurt women, unleashing graphically described menstrual storms (yes, you are reading this right) that "drown the more vicious and notorious predators. Because in my wisdom, I saw fit to cleanse the trash and nourish the soil." (25-6)

Mermaid Fillet's intervention into the cultural imagination of Cape Town represents violence against women to maintain a sustained critique of institutionalized misogyny (Stuit). My

intervention in reading this text is to examine its critique of neoliberal logics of commodity fetishism, a critique that is facilitated by the novel's symbolic deployment of the image of the mermaid as representative of the characters' desires (Stuit). This is done by comparing the subjectivities of Banggat and Perd. The novel offers a paratextual index of the characters informing the reader of their "type" and other biographical information. For example, "Banggat" is technically unnamed, and their moniker is instead a reference to their personality as a "scaredy cat". "Perd" (Whaleed Moegsien) is a "Grootman", the "man in charge" of the operation as commissioned by "M16inyourbek" (leader of the novel's organised crime syndicate). I use these two characters due to their direct relationship, as Perd coerces Banggat to retrieve a lost item on behalf of "M16inyourbek".

The world of Cape Town is irrevocably changed by the storm the Goddess' unleashes. The "sea had turned to menstrual blood... The seaweed blossomed bigger and wilder, the fish mutated with female hormones, and the pearlescent creatures were even more luminescent than usual. New species flourished in the strange tide, and these species were concentrated on the Cape coast" (Arderne 51-52). The imagery amplifies the essential qualities inherent to the organisms represented here. This is significant as this process is described alongside the return of the leader of the novel's organised crime syndicate. The leader is only named by their Twitter handle "M16inyourbek". This character is returning to South Africa in tow with women who have been forced into sex work and are now "owned" by "M16inyourbek". This produces a causal relationship in the novel between the two events, causing a redescription of the normal. Therefore, the novel uses narrative strategies of magical realism, such as the equivalence of the natural with the supernatural. This allows for the articulation of relations of cruel optimism by instantiating relationships between the natural and the supernatural as in the novel this relationship symbolically mimics the kinds of desire theorised by Berlant. This is most readily shown by Banggat's the logic of capital accumulation. They were born with Nike Air Jordans on their feet, and spend their time accumulating more high-end sneakers, bankrupting themselves in the process. Additionally, beyond even Jordans, they want "mermaid fillet"; desiring "the best" (10). To Banggat, money had a "call" (10). To them it was "endless in pitch. So spacious in reverb you can live inside the sound" (10). Banggat's life is therefore composed of their unrelenting need to accumulate. However, this desire also functions to place Banggat in a position of economic precarity as shown further, demonstrating that the objects of their desire become an obstacle to their flourishing.

There are two Cape Towns, as the Goddess reminds us in the book's conclusions. This novel is set in Ravensmead, Delft, and Belleville South, areas of Cape Town underrepresented and marginalised from the literary and cultural imagination of the city. These characters offer a mode of legibility to the city, as narrated by the Goddess. Simone observes that representations of space can "act to "pin down" inseparable connections between places, people, actions, and things" (Simone 409). This is achieved by the meta-narration the Goddess provides at the beginning and the end of each chapter. Her hermeneutic lens functions to inscribe the relationship between "places, people and things" in which the subjectivity of Cape Town is mediated. In her words:

We live for Friday—post memes to Friday, play tributes to it, praise the higher powers for it. We celebrate, thank and exalt the sheen of Friday, the rapture, the relief, the oblivion, the peace of Friday. We want to ingest and digest it, drink it, have it fill us—in a huge collective act of Friday worship, every week. And festive season? Well, festive season is the Friday of seasons. (Arderne 24)

This collective cultural celebration of the end of the working week offers insight into the nature of wage labour under neoliberal orthodoxy. Characters like Banggat flail in the office, spending their time shopping online for sneakers, yearning for Friday and the festive season. Yet this yearning, with its positive, worshipping attitude towards leisure time (defined as time spent away from work), costs Banggat their job when they are caught not working. Banggat self-sabotages their economic security through their commodity fetishism, articulating this as "self-care" (11). The novel's deployment of irony here highlights this absurdity, as the consequences of Banggat's actions (they are fired and then coerced into the retrieval of the Tamagotchi by "M16inyourbek's" henchmen) increase the precarity of their situation. Banggat's dismissal triggers the plot of *Mermaid Fillet*. They are tasked with retrieving the Tamagotchi, which has been help in a police evidence lock-up since a car crash (read assassination) killed "M16inyourbek's" son. The Tamagotchi has a PIN on its back that opens a safe holding "M16inyourbek's" retirement fund. However, most of the novel is spread between the narratives of many other people navigating Cape Town, who are only tangentially associated with Banggat. As such, the novel relies on characterisation to facilitate its representation of Cape Town. What these characters offer is a *transgressive* representation of Cape Town, as they trouble normative conceptions through the novel's subversive deployment of stereotypes.

Simone observes that “the disposition of regularities and the outcomes of collaborative work in the city can be open ended, unpredictable, and made singular” (409). Perd stands nearly two metres tall, mimetically reproducing his characterisation as “Grootman”. He also suffers from depression, is asexual, and struggles with his conception of self. Perd’s narration is incredibly self-aware. He wakes one day “happier than he had [been] in years”. And yet, “he knew its transience”. He knows that by measuring the outcome of his life monetarily he is a successful man. And yet, he could not foresee that “his success would be as empty as his failures”. He evaluates his days as a monotonous use of his time: “his entire day, every day, was just carrying”. He survives his depression through anti-depressants and via the uncritical adoption of neoliberal attitudes towards time and money; that his existence is sufficiently maintained through the routine he has constructed:

But what a champion routine can be if you impose it on yourself. The redemptive routine of needing to make money. All the time. (Arderne 145)

Perd’s characterisation is unpredictable and subversive, and therefore articulates the fraying of the good life fantasy. He has all that he (ostensibly) needs. Perd’s consciousness is therefore defined as in “crisis”, a crisis postponed by pills and cash. Berlant argues that one of the consequences of the present moment, characterised by cruel optimism, is that “the present moment increasingly imposes itself on consciousness as a moment in extended crisis” (Berlant 7). Furthermore, this “genre of crisis” is an “ongoing condition into an intensified situation in which extensive threats to survival are said to dominate the reproduction of life” (Berlant 7). Perd’s success as a gangster is predicated on his powers of concentration, as well as by the form of his body, represented as gigantic, physically domineering over other men. Even when he himself is physically dominated (as shown in chapter 3 by his narration and by Banggat’s), he is quick-witted and brutally murders a rival (Arderne 58). He evaluates his actions as violent, but not cruel. How he behaves is by necessity, not by desire. The consequences of these frayed fantasies are that they eventually fail, shown by Banggat’s punishment and Perd’s suicide, and by analysing the respective characterisation of Banggat and Perd, the novel articulates the logic of cruel optimism inherent within the city of Cape Town, particularly through the respective relationships the characters have to the “festive season”. The festive season represents collective cultural celebration, and yet the very act of celebrating justifies economic irresponsibility as shown by Banggat. Or, in the case of Perd, the recognition that he has nothing to celebrate articulates the arbitrary nature of the celebration itself.

CONCLUSION: SPECULATIVE LITERATURE AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Mermaid Fillet offers a character sketch, of people and of the city, and how they interact together. Its tone is dark and subversive, examining how maintaining the fantasies of a “good life” under the city’s neoliberal paradigm is achieved by a life of crime. Similarly, *Thirteen Cents* uses Azure as a focal point for the systemic issues brought into the New South Africa. The novels variously deploy the idea of people as infrastructure as a mode for navigating the post-Apartheid city. *Thirteen Cents* articulates this explicitly, with a network of actors shaped and circulated around Azure. These actors are opaque, only represented through the narrative perspective of a child, a narrative that can only inhere a speculative and apocalyptic form in order to make sense of the world around them. *Mermaid Fillet* produces a more tangential relationship, using characters whose subjectivities represent similar worldviews mediated by the desire for security and happiness. This is therefore rendered ambiguously, as the characters of Banggat and Perd both perish to their desires. However, it is the form that maintains the ambiguity of their narrative resolutions, as Perd ostensibly “swims away” as a mermaid after his suicide and Banggat’s death is articulated as a future promise and not held within the finite set of representations in the novel. These speculative and uncertain moments are construed ambiguous to the extent that they agree with Myambo’s premise articulated above. The novels critique their respective contemporary moments in the new South Africa, and specifically Cape Town, “by throwing light on the marginalized fringes of society”. This showcases the utility of allegorical modes of representation, not to the extent that all fictive representations are allegorical, but instead to showcase how in the moment of failure of representation, the subject of the set of the representations is mediated by the acknowledged failures. In the case of the novels here, *Thirteen Cents* uses the moments of narcotics usage, lucid dreams, and apocalyptic imagery to represent the failure within the city of Cape Town to transform into a post-Apartheid city. *Mermaid Fillet* uses the storm and the Goddess to transform the city as punishment for male violence against women, and in so doing reveals the failure of the post-Apartheid city of Cape Town to transform those marginalised, represented on the fringes. I borrow Simone’s language here, “their similarity is generated precisely through the disarticulation of coherent urban space” (Simone 429). It is through this disarticulation by allegory that the novels showcase the utility of the speculative form in mediating our understanding of Cape Town, and that this understanding is characterised as a relation of cruel optimism towards the city itself.

CHAPTER 3

UTOPIA IN *THIRTEEN CENTS AND IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE THIS WAY*: IDEOLOGICAL DIVERSIONS

INTRODUCTION: CIRCLING UTOPIA

Stories circulate through space in interesting ways, both physically and conceptually. The texts that I examine here are as much mediated by the place as well as the ideological space in which they inhabit and represent. As per Eagleton, “concealed structures of values which informs and underlies our factual statements is part of what is meant by ‘ideology’.” He writes further that “[l]iterature, in the meaning of the word that we have inherited, *is* an ideology” (Eagleton 22). The two novels I discuss here were both published by Kwela Books, but twenty years apart, and therefore circulate the space of the city in differing ways. However, as shall be seen, they occupy the same physical space in their respective narratives, producing a kind of cultural imaginary of Cape Town. Therefore, I aim to unpack how the trope of utopia is deployed in Cape Town towards constructing the idealism utopia-as-ideology denotes. Cape Town is a complex city, with its history of Apartheid spatial segregation still writ large in the geography of the city (Turok 2350). However, what emerges in discourse about Cape Town post-apartheid is a kind of utopic idealism rooted heavily in flows of capital and globalisation. This is where my intervention presents itself, using novels that produce and participate in this discourse, in order to understand this contradictory representation of the city as utopic and dystopic. Speculative Fiction in South Africa maintains its utility by grappling with the representation of the everyday in utopic/dystopic urban settings. Additionally, my analysis uses “narrative apocalypse” to describe how the novel terminates the structure of the narrative through apocalyptic imagery, and in doing so the genre can reframe the multiple past and present realities of the urban environment. In this regard, I address how the genre’s trope of utopia is used to mediate spatial conceptions of Cape Town. *Thirteen Cents*, and *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way* (hereafter referred to as *IDHTBTW*) offer competing representations of the privatisation of space emblematic of the onset of neo-liberal politics that followed South

Africa's transition to democracy post 1994. The characters' "everyday" in the novels is mediated by competing visions of utopia/dystopia. This can be shown through the circulation of the characters through the city, as shown by Azure in *Thirteen Cents* and by Malcom in *IDHTBTW*. While *Thirteen Cents* does not offer the vision of "digital doom" represented in *IDHTBTW*, read together the novels address theorizations of futurity in Cape Town. Drawing on the work of Ashcroft, Jameson, Robinson, and Tšehloane, I show how speculative fiction addresses the contradictory development of the city-space that is represented as simultaneously utopic and dystopic.

Cape Town, as per Bickford-Smith and Turok, has been characterised in polarised terms. Turok writes:

Greater Cape Town is a starkly polarised city. Affluent suburbs and prosperous economic centres offering rich opportunities of all kinds contrast with overcrowded, impoverished dormitory settlements on the periphery. This partly reflects the topography and environment: stunning mountain and coastal settings juxtaposed with the wind-swept, flood-prone, sand plains of the Cape Flats. Wide income inequalities sort people across this space according to their ability to buy into different quality neighbourhoods and lifestyles through the housing market. Underlying this for many years was a system of racial ideology and planning that emphasised separate human, economic and spatial development. It inscribed deep divisions into the geography of the city through population controls, forced removal and separate, unequal governing institutions. (Turok 2350)

Bickford-Smith builds upon this, noting that the focus in economic development on the already affluent areas perpetuates the kinds of systemic injustices Turok sees as mapped onto the space of Cape Town. Furthermore, Brown-Luthango, in her analysis of transit-oriented development, notes that the city's approach here is motivated towards the protection of the already acknowledged wealthy areas (Brown-Luthango 5). Brown-Luthango's analysis is generative as she acknowledges the distinction between neoliberalism as an ideology and as a set of institutional practices. As such, the transformation of Cape Town post-Apartheid has seen the city concentrate wealth in areas formerly classified as "white" (Turok 2350). I use *Thirteen Cents* to examine the predatory nature of whiteness, its proximity to wealth, and how the novel's utopian idealism seeks to enact meaningful transformation by removing whiteness.

However, when read in conjunction with *IDHTBTW*, the emergence of Van Der Vlies' affect of disappointment is shown by the concentration of wealth within the ostensibly "utopian" space—recognizing that the neoliberal utopia of the Citadel is actually a corporate dystopia. This affect shows how despite the promised aim of the Constitution at enacting meaningful change, South African speculative fiction recognizes the failure of the city to stop the kinds of wealth accumulation perpetuating Apartheid's spatial violence.

Ashcroft writes that:

The peril of utopia is that, although imagined, it is a place, and spatial perfection requires boundaries, control, limits and direction. Such limits, although automatically assumed to be necessary for order and good government, carry the constant threat of Law, which introduces the ever-present possibility of dystopia. (413)

Thirteen Cents and *IDHTBTW* present differing conceptions of utopia. In *Thirteen Cents*, as identified by Tšehloane, utopia is constructed in opposition to capitalist instrumentalist value systems, whereas *IDHTBTW* presents a utopic/dystopic disjuncture in which they are consonant with each other. Therefore, this chapter seeks to unpack the concealed structure of values that informs utopic thinking within Cape Town. One hand, this examines the relationship between the pastoral and the natural as shown by *Thirteen Cents*. This is achieved by examining the nature of selfhood as constructed within the mountain sanctuary, building upon Tšehloane's examination of the novel. In this regard utopic idealism within this space is developed towards the fulfilment of self, as opposed to its exploitation within the urban city bowl. On the other hand, *IDHTBTW* develops a relativist account of utopic/dystopic value system in which the persistence of "capitalist instrumentalist" values differentiates these ideologically imbricated spaces. This difference is produced by the hyper-regulated space of The Citadel, which I will read as utopic as it conceals the ideological capacity of neoliberalism present in its spatial boundary. This is contrasted against "Kapelitsha Island"; that I read as dystopic for the way in which the state of nature that produces the value-system within is *not* concealed. Instead the residents of "Kapelitsha Island" are fully aware of the poverty of their environment, and therefore, ideology is not absent but wholly represented as fundamental.

Jameson begins his assessment of Utopia by engaging its literary valency, saying:

Utopia has always been a political issue, an unusual destiny for a literary form: yet just as the literary value of the form is subject to permanent doubt, so also its political status is structurally ambiguous. The fluctuations of its historical context do nothing to resolve this variability, which is also not a matter of taste or individual judgment. (xi)

As given elsewhere, reflecting on South Africa's present through the realm of fiction is always a political project (Myambo; Van Der Vlies; Thurman). This may be done through affective studies, or through an examination of the political economy or by the discursive function brought upon by the transition to democracy and its questions of temporality. Speculative fiction in South Africa creates space for examining the utopian idealism brought upon by the South African transition, by examining the ideologies that have been concealed by this transition, or, if they were not hidden from view, speculative fiction transforms them by functions of space or time, so that they may be better understood. This is shown in *Thirteen Cents* and *IDHTBTW*, bookending as they do two decades of South Africa's present. What emerges is a discourse about what South Africa can be, and what it has become. Speculative fiction in this regard as a form brings about certain advantages in this discussion, as it refuses a hegemonic totality of its representation. In insisting on an additional symbolic layer, it performs a cognitive estrangement on the reader (Suvin 8). This defamiliarization brings into view that which lay hidden. In the case of the novels I examine, utopian discourse as produced by the democratic transition is critiqued. *Thirteen Cents* offers a radical utopian discourse, insisting that a *tabula rasa* is the only way in which any "fundamental change in our social existence" can be exercised. Consequently, in reading *IDHTBTW*, its vision of utopia is coopted by forces of neoliberalism, and the effects of utopian discourse are Stalinist in their representation. It lays bare the perils of utopianism; "the constant threat of law, which introduces the ever-possibility of dystopia" (Ashcroft 413).

LIQUID IDEALISM: CONSTRUCTING THE *TABULA RASA*

Fredric Jameson argues that:

Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet. (xii)

The novels I examine here are read comparatively towards understanding how utopic representations of urban spaces mediate the space of Cape Town. In this respect, the novels reflect on the nature of the “social totality” comprised within its city-space. This is achieved by understanding the novel’s reflections on space and spatiality, drawing on Jennifer Robinson’s definition of spatiality, which she defines as “the ways in which cities assemble people, things, ideas, and resources, and distribute these within the city or set them in circulation again beyond the physical reaches of the city”. For example, our protagonist in *Thirteen Cents*, Azure, navigates the space of Cape Town, surviving its harsh crime-ridden streets, before seeking refuge in a cave atop Table Mountain where the idyllic setting allows him to reflect on Cape Town’s social totality. In his dreams, he meets Sarah Baartman during his stay in his mountain sanctuary. In their interaction, the novel instantiates a new symbolic mode of representation, facilitating a “meditation on radical difference”. This is because the dream-state allows for an additional layer of symbolic engagement with the city of Cape Town. Azure indicates this through his narration:

In my dreams I walk all over Cape Town. I meet everyone I know and they all say nothing to me. Their lips are sewn together with wire and they bleed. I see everyone I know except Gerald. I even see myself walking up the mountain. My skin is thin and looks like a lizard’s with all the markings. (143)

This radical difference is expressed through multiple mediums. Azure is differentiated from himself (by the out-of-body experience in which he observes his own navigation of the city) and is differentiated from those that he knows as they cannot acknowledge the moment of address as they are prevented from speaking to him. Furthermore, the “lizard markings” are read as precursor to the motif of the “T-Rex”, a future characterisation of Azure imbued with the power to transform Cape Town which has been gestating in his mountain sanctuary. This is indicated by the character of Sarah Baartman, who feeds Azure and provides him with the knowledge of his future transformation. The issue with any examination of the symbolic within this surreal and unstable narrative segment is taking argumentative leaps that require too much speculation. However, understanding these images in context of one another is useful for understanding the affective construction of Cape Town that has been produced. Within the dream-state, the T-rex offers a patrimonial lineage of destruction (as Sarah Baartman locates Azure as the last of the T-Rex’s and tells Azure that he is preceded by her husband and her

father). This references legacies of historical trauma, and foreshadows Cape Town's narrative apocalypse, as Azure watches a T-Rex inflict havoc on the city. Given that this is facilitated by his dream-state, located within the mountain sanctuary on Table Mountain, the pastoral solitude offers Azure sufficient interpretative space to understand his circulation within the city. This is expressed by his observation during his mountain stay that he "has never been on [his] own this long in Cape Town. It feels good. [He] doesn't feel rushed" (132). Tšehloane argues that this showcases how the

narrator-protagonist discovers complete contentment and fulfilment in this utopian space. This total withdrawal from conventional society exists alongside the cataclysmic demise of the world. (92)

As per Ashcroft, utopian spaces are defined by their boundaries and their limitations, a paradox that is neatly avoided here in the dream-state. Instead of offering a vision of totality of the mountain space, as a hegemonic location from which a relationship of exploitation and subjugation is imposed on the city of Cape Town, the space offers the idealism of self-fulfilment. In the destruction of Cape Town in this dream-state, the possibility of Azure's difference is precluded. No one here seeks to exploit his body, nor do they desire his blue eyes. This utopian idealism simultaneously rescues Sarah Baartman from the same historical treatment she was subjected to that is mimicked in this novel by the constant marking of Azure's difference, his blue eyes.

Their engagement precedes the biblical apocalypse that destroys Cape Town in the novel's final moments. Tsehloane provides generous analysis of this novel, stating that:

This kind of a tragic resolution to a social conflict between the narrator-protagonist and the hostile social order is a dominant theme in this narrative.

The desire for social change exists but remains as an idealism that is frustrated at every turn in the novel. The text resolves the dilemma through a pastoral solitude of the mountain sanctuary. This mountain sanctuary exists outside the harsh realities of capitalist modernity and its instrumentalist values. (92)

Cape Town's narrative destruction signifies a kind of Fanonian *tabula rasa*, where the utopian idealism of the mountain sanctuary lives on beyond the urban infrastructure decimated by fire and water. Therefore, the novel is useful for understanding the characterisation of Cape Town

in the moment of transition post-Apartheid, given its publication in 2000, and offers a touchstone for comparisons with other novels seeking to mediate representations of Cape Town through the speculative form. In this characterisation, the city of the novel has circulated Azure beyond its immediate urban spaces, and in Azure's narrative the city needs to be imagined anew in order to truly take its place in the new South Africa. This imagining anew is facilitated by the novel's focalisation of water as argued by Samuelson. She argues that:

[e]mbodied in Azure's paradoxical combination of "blue eyes" and "dark skin", the peculiar characteristics of water thus offer a suggestive medium for thinking across the "unevenly universal" nature of environmental harm under neoliberal conditions and for "remold [ing] the Anthropocene as a shared story about unshared resources. (466)

Given water's formless nature—as a substance that takes the form of the container it inhabits—it offers a useful analytic to compare with Ashcroft's examination of Utopia as a bounded space. This shows the contrast between the two novels I examine here, as Azure's utopic idealism is connected with the novel's focalisation of water as imbued with the capacity for change and healing. Conversely, in *IDHTBTW*, water is represented as the fulcrum upon which the novel's conflict is driven. It is used to highlight the socio-economic divide within the city rather than emphasize its unifying qualities as represented in *Thirteen Cents*. This is shown through the allocation of the resource along lines of class, as those in Kapelitsha Island queue for a meagre allotment, and those in the Citadel are supplied by desalination plants and other resilience infrastructure. Samuelson argues that by attending to the ways that water is enclosed, intersections between the legacies of apartheid and global capitalism can be observed, particularly through the understanding of captive labour as reservoirs. Azure's utopic idealism as a means of transformation or becoming is also facilitated by the movement of water. Azure is always characterised in the process of "becoming", as a T-Rex by Sarah Baartman or as an "adult" by himself. Understanding transformation within the context of the novel is useful given the connections to the idealism inherent in the South African constitution as indicated in earlier chapters.

According to Ashcroft, in most of "contemporary utopian theory Utopia is no longer a place but the spirit of hope itself, the essence of desire for a better world". This is recognised in the spirit of the Constitution of the New South Africa, as per Judge Langa. He argues that the goal of transformation is "to heal the wounds of the past and guide us to a better future". As such,

the novel attends to the material practices in the city that rely on predation and exploitation. These practices can be both individual and systemic. As an example, Azure's markers of difference—his blue eyes—are commodified and desired by white men. Azure walks the streets of Sea Point in order to broadcast his availability for sex work. These interactions are repeated many times throughout the novel, in which white men exploit Azure “drawn by [his] blue eyes”. “Whiteness” is denoted in proximity to wealth in various ways in the novel. Most notably, Azure's sexual engagement with a white investment banker allows insights into the novel's observations. They meet on a park bench in Sea Point, and he takes Azure into his home, where “almost everything is white... His manners are sickening”. The banker's mannerisms lead Azure to conclude that “white people are evil”. This is drawn out by the man's predation of Azure, by reducing him to a sexual commodity through his desire of Azure's eyes, as well the ostentatiousness of the man's apartment, with gold taps, a white leather sofa so soft Azure could fall asleep in it, as well as a TV displaying the room back to Azure—recording his movements (100-102). Azure compares the man with Auntie Joyce, whom he entrusted with the money he earns from sex work, and how the man wants to control him, like Gerald and Allen (108). This interaction can be viewed within the system of exploitation that is produced by the city's spatial violence. Wealth (and whiteness) are congregated in particular areas like Sea Point. Those living precariously like Azure have to navigate those areas in order to maintain some level of self-preservation. However, this sets them up for exploitation by the same people who inhabit those spaces. In doing so, the city perpetuates the kinds of spatial violence produced by the Apartheid system. Azure's walking is necessarily produced as *transgressive*, but is never offered any level of social or economic support towards surviving the city's harsh streets. Azure's walking is transgressive but aimed towards securing a better future. He narrates that in “everyone I pass I can see a little of myself. I carry a little of everyone I know in me” and so through walking he comes to know Cape Town (Samuelson 466). He walks to his mountain sanctuary from where in his symbolic state he sees what is necessary for change, and so narrates the complete and total transformation of Cape Town imbued with a Fanonian utopian idealism; that for the space to be transformed towards a better future, Cape Town's predatory exploitative whiteness needs to be washed away.

CONTAINERIZED UTOPIA: CIRCULATION AND COMPLICITY

Where *Thirteen Cents* establishes the “pastoral” or the “natural” as the basis for utopian idealism in opposition to capitalist modernity, *IDHTBTW* pessimistically offers no alternative to the inevitable decline that its title eponymously implies. Its vision of “utopia” is instead:

a program which neglected human frailty and original sin, and betrayed a will to uniformity and the ideal purity of a perfect system that always had to be imposed by force on its imperfect and reluctant subjects. (Jameson)

This is shown by the novel’s examination of the enduring spirit of instrumental, capitalist values. As Cape Town descends into an apocalyptic wasteland, its wealthy citizens take their refuge atop Signal Hill in a security complex called the Citadel. Read comparatively, they occupy almost the same space that many years prior Azure took refuge in. Our subject for this section of the narrative, Malcolm, is a software developer whose wellness app for processing traumatic memories has been coopted by security services, a company called FeelSafe (an Orwellian nomenclature). In this world, where your consciousness is mediated by a cerebral implant, FeelSafe aim to use Malcom’s app to prevent insurgencies, resistance and social outrage. As Malcolm quits the project, the novel uses this moment to show the fascist, uniform system imposed upon the citizens in Cape Town through the proliferation of a globalised, neoliberal value system, where mental health is monetized towards “security”. As such, Utopia in this novel is represented as per Jameson’s formulation above; imposed forcefully on “imperfect and reluctant subjects”. The citizens navigate the Citadel using their implants, integrating both physical and digital urbanisms, yet their lives, far from being free and independent, are regulated by the space (both physically and digitally) that they occupy. This novel is generative for understanding the conception of Utopia under a neoliberal paradigm, which is not to say that the state has been completely privatised, but reconfigured. The citizens of Cape Town that remain outside the walls of the Citadel live in poverty, with water security and security of person almost non-existent. They queue for water daily at the Citadel’s gates, and their lives are governed by a paramilitary vigilante group called the Shepherds. The novel’s representation of space in this regard juxtaposes inherent inequality and amplifies the reflection of Cape Town in our contemporary moment, with its focus on water inequality and on the proliferating private security industry that govern our urban spaces. Ashcroft writes of utopia’s fatal flaw, that:

utopia is unable to manage the contest between the education and the manipulation of desire, consequently all realized utopias *are degenerate* – to achieve utopia is to fail to realize the possibilities of utopia.

The Citadel shows this descent into neoliberal induced decline. The complex was originally conceived as a kind of resilience infrastructure, with “desalination plants”, “rooftop wind and solar farms” and “crop gardens” (58). It sits high on Signal Hill, “across the top of the mountain, high enough for even the most severe ocean-level rise projections”. As environmental collapse creeps nearer, the complex expands in size three times, covering Lion’s Head as well. It is “surrounded by firebreaks and flame retardant walls” (113). This representation perpetuates instead of critiques the inequality of the existing social space. Consider instead the representation of the same geography in *Thirteen Cents* as analysed by Tšhloane. He argues that:

The utopian spaces, either as enclaves or spaces of pastoral solitude, are not only discrete social spaces but also places of different values out of the reach of the prevailing dystopian reality and its unsavoury conventions. (98)

However, in *IDHTBTW*, the instrumental accumulation of capital upon the same space that Azure used to produce his critique of Cape Town effectively erases the possibility of sustaining *Thirteen Cents*’ Fanonian idealism.

Where the novel needs sustained critique is around race and neoliberal utopia. The novel is focalised by three gay men, two black, one white. Viwe and Luthando both offer environmental idealism in differing ways. As noted previously, Luthando’s activism is insurgent and idealistic. Luthando recognizes that the social totality needs to be transformed to avoid the ecological damage that is inflicted in the city. Viwe, however, is pragmatic and practical, and this is evidenced by his design for the Citadel. Nevertheless, his project, the Citadel, enacts the kind of capital accumulation that already exists within the city bowl, perpetuating neoliberal orthodoxy. Furthermore, the novel privileges whiteness though the way the characters are circulated in response to environmental collapse. Viwe and Luthando never experience the benefit of their hard work fighting against climate change. Luthando’s prison record prevents him from entering the Citadel, and Viwe’s love for him sees the two of them stuck outside the Citadel, as Viwe is unable to let Luthando go. However, their friend Malcolm, a white man, is

ensconced inside the Citadel. The Citadel is not conceived as place that is racially exclusionary. There is no racial segregation. However, the novel perpetuates the exploitation of Black labour as Malcolm enjoys the benefits of Viwe and Luthando's work. Malcolm withdraws his attendance from Luthando's rallies and offers no support other than allyship towards their activism.

Given the novel's focalisation of the three characters in telling the story of environmental collapse in Cape Town, how they are circulated reflects the novel's attitude towards race. As per Turok and Bickford-Smith, geographic regions in Cape Town are characterised by race and class because of the legacies of Apartheid spatial planning, in which areas were racially segregated and then managed in a manner that produced significant economic stratification. Turok characterises this as a city defined by affluent suburban and urban centres such as Sea Point and the City Bowl in contrast to the "dormitory suburbs" of the Cape Flats and Cape Town's "townships". These areas were defined by their economic impoverishment, overcrowded rental accommodation and their peripheral location (Turok). *IDHTBTW* is a complex novel in this regard, because it shrinks the physical space in which the residents of Cape Town can live, as the rising sea levels and the constant wildfires essentially circumscribe the city as the city bowl. The "dormitory settlements" as identified by Turok instead occupy the formerly affluent city bowl, and the wealthy residents of the city bowl occupy the Citadel. This amplifies the problem of spatial violence, in which the violence inflicted upon the residents of Kapelitsha Island mimics the very real violence that Capetonians suffer daily. There is no public infrastructure outside the Citadel, and residents fight a daily existential threat when searching for food and water against the deathly heat and the howling winds to maintain their survival. The issue with the novel's representation of space in Cape Town is not that poverty exists. The novel perpetuates attitudes towards space, race and capital within Cape Town by circulating the singular white protagonist Malcolm within spaces of privilege, and never interrogating his privilege, which in this case is that his existence is never questioned in a novel about the existential threat to their life due to climate collapse. This circulation of Malcolm can be compared with the way that *Thirteen Cents* circulates Azure. Azure walks the street, and as referenced prior, is represented as transgressive. Azure, through his subversion of boundaries of race, class and sexuality offers a portrait of the city that Malcolm can never have access to. Malcolm's inability to participate, containerised by capital and race means he is read as complicit within the space of the enclosed neoliberal utopia. Therefore, the use of space figured as utopic in contrast to the extreme conditions in the rest of Cape Town thereof

perpetuates racialised conceptions of space as exclusionary along lines of wealth and race (aggregated focalisation of attitudes towards race).

Comparing containerization in *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way* to *Thirteen Cents* shows how the novels address neoliberal orthodoxy and utopia. According to Samuelson, Azure subverts and transgresses the containerization of water by thinking through its “peculiar characteristics” (Azure’s relationship to water is represented as nurturing, rejuvenating, cleansing, juxtaposed with the “assembly line” of the ocean that facilitates containerized shipping) and therefore offers “a suggestive medium for thinking across the “unevenly universal” nature of environmental harm under neoliberal conditions” given his embodied characteristics (Samuelson refers to his blue eyes and dark skin). However, in *It Doesn't Have to Be This Way*, Malcolm becomes “contained” within the Citadel, and Luthando is stranded outside it, perpetuating a cycle of racial violence by locating whiteness within networks of privilege and by marginalizing Blackness within precarity.

CONCLUSION: UTOPIC DISAPPOINTMENT

The novels examined here, as typical of literature post-Apartheid, vacillate between exterior and interior signs. Azure’s first person narration submerges the reader entirely within the system of signs that consist within his subjective experience, mediated by the brutal exterior sign that is a Cape Town permeated by gangsters and predators. Similarly with *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* the novel produces a rigorous examinations of subjectivity within the city of Cape Town, by focusing on the dissolution of the political as a viable intervention into the material quality of its subjects lives. Reading these texts as a study of everyday practice, uncovers, “like sedimented layers, the surplus of past utopian aspirations remaining in the present” (Van der Vlies 12). *Thirteen Cents*’ Azure instantiates a relationship between economic security and utopia, and in doing so invokes the representation of utopia as *no-place*, casting a Fanonian transformation of Cape Town through the novel’s violent rewriting of the city, because Azure’s study of his everyday practice in the city reaches this inevitable conclusion. This is supported by my engagement of the novel’s representation of the historical figure of Sarah Baartman, who appears in Azure’s dreams as he resides in his mountain sanctuary. *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* focalises utopian politics through the contrast between Luthando’s activism and the security of Malcom’s everyday practices in Citadel in the novel’s apocalyptic future. This pits a concern for the planet’s futurity against neoliberal

individualism that licenses the responsibility for self-preservation through economic privilege. This vacillation between interior (for example, Azure's subjectivity; Malcom's political apathy) and exterior signs (activism and revolution) treads a thin line between a literature of the spectacle and a literature of the ordinary.

The examination of these two texts allows for generative insights into the nature of space in Cape Town. They produce competing ideological foundations for the understanding of utopic idealism in the city. By examining how the two novels reconfigure the space of Cape Town, and how this affects the subjectivity of the characters located within the city, they participate in the discourse of utopic idealism that developed in Cape Town post-apartheid. In the case of *Thirteen Cents* the circulation of Azure through the city concentrates this idealism in opposition to the instrumentalist capitalist value system that circumscribed his meagre survival. In *IDHTBTW*, the contrasting fortunes of the three protagonists showcases the neoliberal creep into the city of Cape Town, where Azure's mountain sanctuary defined in opposition to the ideological underpinnings of neoliberalism has been replaced by resilience infrastructure, conceived with the intention to continue capital accumulation beyond the end of the world. As such, the novels generatively reconstitute the same space, highlighting Van Der Vlies' observation of disappointment that affectively characterises South African literature.

CHAPTER 4:

SPECULATIVE FICTION IN CAPE TOWN:

ADDRESSING REPRESENTATIONS OF

APOCALYPSE

INTRODUCTION: APOCALYPTIC NARRATIVES

In James Berger's discussion of apocalypse in *After The End*, he conceptualises three representations of apocalypse. The first representation is "the actual imagined end of the world" that he calls "eschaton", with imagery that is typically associated with religious representations of apocalypse such as in the Book of John and the Book of Revelations (Berger 5). The second set of representations are "catastrophes that resemble the imagined final ending" - which Berger uses to historicize a temporality *before* and a temporality *after* (Berger 5). Finally, he synthesise the two prior representations of apocalypse as "*interpretive*" or "*explanatory*" (Berger 5). In this chapter, I conduct a close reading of three novels using Berger's theorisation as a textual methodology. As a result of Berger's contributions, "narrative apocalypse" is a term I develop to describe how the novel of *Thirteen Cents* terminates the structure of the narrative through apocalyptic imagery. *Thirteen Cents* will be read for its representation of the actualised representation of the destruction of Cape Town in the moment of narrative resolution. *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way* (hereafter referred to as "*IDHTBTW*") will be read for its representation of catastrophe that approaches an imagined end, as the novel progresses towards the apocalyptic wasteland typically identified as post-cataclysmic. *Mermaid Fillet* will be read through the interpretive lens of apocalypse, as the trope of catastrophe/cataclysm represented in the novel is deployed towards an explicitly explanatory/revelatory function. These representations of apocalypse showcase its imaginative potential, as in *Thirteen Cents* and *Mermaid Fillet* the tropes are deployed towards destabilising narrative and how narrative produces space, compared to its oppressive and hegemonic representation in *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way*, in which space produces narrative. Our engagement with the city-space in these novels is mediated by planetary transformations that correspond with tropes of apocalypse, and in explicating these tropes I aim to show their reciprocal relationship.

Therefore I show how apocalypse rendered imaginatively is read as both liberatory through the language of Fanon and contradictory as typical of the affect of disillusionment that characterises contemporary South African literature.

These representations, however, are read contrapuntally to showcase a more general affect of disappointment in South Africa as per Van der Vlies (in *Present Imperfect*). This is shown by the Fanonian tabula rasa produced in *Thirteen Cents* compared to the “slow”, inevitable post-apocalyptic wasteland of Cape Town’s future in *It Doesn’t Have To Be This Way*. This ambivalence is a product of apocalyptic thinking, in the words of James Berger, who theorises on the representation of the post-apocalypse, containing a trace of a time before, as well as the unrepresentable *present* of the apocalypse and finally the historical future of either paradise or wasteland. This third usage deploys apocalypse as a kind of revelation, where the apocalypse, in Berger’s words, “must in its destructive moment clarify and illuminate the true nature of what has been brought to an end” (Berger 5). These conceptions of apocalypse are not mutually exclusive, and can be read for their interventions into ontological, epistemological and moral discourses. For example, *Mermaid Fillet’s* cataclysmic imagery is characterised as vengeful, punishing men for their acts of violence against women. In this novel, the apocalyptic imagery I identify is read towards an explanatory understanding of gender-based violence as articulated by Stuit. Reading these three texts together confirms to some extent Van der Vlies’ examination of affect in contemporary South African literature, and therefore showcases apocalypse as a conditional response to the logic of neoliberalism.

NARRATIVE APOCALYPSE :

Thirteen Cents has already been generously examined for its engagement with apocalyptic thinking as shown in “Tragic Optimism: Utopia and the Apocalyptic Demise of the World in Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams*” by Tšehloane. In this article, Tšehloane argues that the novel provides an “unconscious ideological resort to the apocalyptic demise of the world, as the final and decisive solution to the unresolvable social contradictions” (Tšehloane 91). Furthermore, Tšehloane pairs his reading of *Thirteen Cents* with Duiker’s second novel *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* to showcase how apocalyptic thinking

manifests itself variously as a whimsical aspiration, as a certain prophetic forecast of the future, as dreams and as hallucinations of the narrator-protagonists. The narratives legitimize and validate an apocalyptic demise as both a metaphor for an insurrectionary

violence and a retributive action by a supernatural being for a moral infringement committed against the cosmic order. The stories are unable to resolve the nature of this change as either willed by human agents or authored by supernatural powers. The impossibility of imagining a future beyond the present, a view that the post-apartheid dispensation is the end of history, beyond which no significant epoch-making events are possible, explains Duiker's narrative ambivalence and prevarication. (Tšehloane 94)

Where my reading of apocalypse intersects with Tšehloane's is the coincidence of the novel's deployment of apocalyptic imagery with the narrative framed as an end to history. Using the novel's biblical and prophetic imagery, I examine how the this usage of apocalypse forecloses the possibility of an imagined future. This reading is significant for my argument as it supports further readings of the persistence of neoliberalism in Cape Town. *Thirteen Cents* presents an opportunity to read apocalyptic thinking with Fanon's conception of the *tabula rasa* of decolonization. My reading of *Thirteen Cents* undertakes an examination of neoliberalism represented in the novel as the impediment to Azure's agency and to his transformation of self. I use Fanon's *tabula rasa* as a conceptual and methodological tool for defining transformation, situated within the context of South Africa's transformation towards democracy.

Fanon writes:

But we have precisely chosen to speak of that kind of *tabula rasa* which characterizes at the outset all decolonization. Its unusual importance is that it constitutes, from the very first day, the minimum demands of the colonized. To tell the truth, the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up. The extraordinary importance of this change is that it is willed, called for, demanded. The need for this change exists in its crude state, impetuous and compelling, in the consciousness and in the lives of the men and women who are colonized. (Fanon 35-36)

It has been noted in previous chapters that the onset of neoliberal governance post-Apartheid has prevented the kind of radical transformation envisaged by the Freedom Charter, and that the prevalence of socio-economic inequality in South Africa as produced by the apartheid government is perpetuated under this paradigm (Myambo). Therefore, if assessing South Africa's transition to democracy through Fanon's decolonial lens, it appears as though this

transformation is at best incomplete; transitional. Literature in South Africa post-Apartheid has noted this transitive property of discourse in South Africa, and critics such as Boehmer and Gaitskell have questioned writers and artists' abilities to confront questions regarding neoliberalism, capital and socio-economic inequality (Myambo). This chapter examines apocalypse as a response to—and an analytic of—neoliberal beliefs represented in speculative fiction novels about Cape Town. I turn to *Thirteen Cents* for its vision of an apocalyptic destruction of Cape Town, and by examining its narrative structure, I discuss its echoes of Fanon in calling for a complete psychological disavowal of colonial legacies.

The novel therefore deploys the symbol of Sarah Baartman's return as necessary for the fulfilment of a South African identity post-Apartheid, as this dream-state in Azure's narration also functions to heal and nurture Azure from the violence of Cape Town's streets. This facilitates the fulfilment of Azure's identity as a "T-Rex", shown by the conclusion of his dream encounter with Sarah Baartman, where the sun "warms up his scales". This is because his instantiation as a T-Rex functions as a transitional encounter between himself and Gerald, the arbiter of violence in Azure's life, and this moment ceases that violence against him, and therefore Azure's transition is mimetically achieved. However, the nuance of his "ordinary life" depicted here as typical of the transition period in South Africa's new cultural moment post-Apartheid (suffering from violence and exploitation), and the suppression of his identity shown by the constant refrain of racial violence inflicted on him for a perceived contravention of normative conceptions of race (his blue eyes and Black skin), is deployed against the reclamation of history into an eternal present *a la* Benjamin's thesis of empty homogenous time, as this prevents easy resolution for the reader merely awaiting revolution. Azure has lived in constant precariousness, his little wealth earned from the exploitation of his body by white men swallowed up by Auntie Joyce, a stand-in for the predatory practices of "banks", maintaining Azure's eternal present (precarity). It is useful therefore, to read his transition as directed towards the fulfilment of his desires, which are adulthood, masculinity and economic security. However, the novel can be read as ambiguous to the extent that his fulfilment of these desires actually takes place. In this instance, he returns from his mountain sanctuary to the sordid and precarious life that characterises Cape Town, where he is no more empowered than he was before, dependent on Sealy instead of Gerald. This brings about the novel's dénouement, that Azure's narration produces the apocalypse that destroys Cape Town. This offers a generative resolution to the problem of Berlant's cruel optimism. Azure's apocalypse resolves the problem of cruel optimism by removing entirely the impediment of Azure's

fulfilment. Sealy recognizes this as well, saying “we have to destroy Cape Town” (165), foreshadowing Azure’s narrative apocalypse. This is shown by Sealy’s belief that “[t]hey want to look inside your head”, referring to systemic and institutional forms of violence present in the novel that have impeded Azure’s subjective as well as material existence, implying that Azure’s subversive presence (as a Black queer man with blue eyes) is sufficient to disrupt the normative relationships that have until this point defined Cape Town. Therefore, Azure’s flourishing as a man is dependent on those structures of violence dissolving, and this shown by his hopeful urgency, urging the waves to engulf Cape Town (“Faster, faster, I say to myself as I watch this trick” 191-192), “apprehending” his own “dialectical interiority” liberating himself “from the dominant enforcements of the real”.

Berger argues that “[v]ery seldom... does the end of the narrative coincide with the end of the world” as whatever is left over “is usually the true object of the apocalyptic writer’s concern” (Berger 6). As such, *Thirteen Cents* is *prima facie* interesting from a narrative perspective for its sequencing of the apocalypse in the culmination of the narrative’s arc. As noted above, Tšehloane argues that this is necessarily the solution to the unresolved societal ills addressed in the novel. However, by accepting Berger’s formulation of apocalypse above, that in the moment of destruction, the apocalypse clarifies what has come to an end. Azure in the final chapter of the novel observes a cataclysmic, end-of-the-world storm that destroys Cape Town. He sees “huge clouds move closer but they don’t come on the mountain top” (191). As he watches the sea “[w]aves start rolling in from the distance... they start moving in over the sand and swallowing the beach” (191). He stands up as the biggest wave he has ever seen rolls in and “crashes into the beach and floods the street” (192). This is followed by another and another, until the waves “crash onto the roads and nearby flats”. “Cars get washed away” (192). The waves are accompanied by an “angry” storm, with “quivering bolts of purple” that fall into the sea (192). A “terrible noise like thunder fills the sky” and “seems to upset the air itself”(192). He sees the largest wave yet, “taller than any building” crash into the side of the mountain below him. “The sky is angry with darkness and purple fire” (193). Finally, the sky “opens up” and “rains with fire” (193). This total transformation of Azure’s environment is consonant with Fanon’s call for decolonization above. However, where Fanon locates the call for decolonization within the analytic of violence as a call to agency, Azure’s narrative uses nature to fundamentally rewrite the space within which the call of decolonization has been made. Cape Town is effectively raised to the ground, as the cataclysmic storm causes the city to crumble and be washed into the sea. Azure is the only person who remains, narrating the

novel's finale with his final thoughts "My mother is dead. My father is dead" (194). Read together, Azure's narration facilitates a rejection of consequentialist, linear narratives of progress, as they have failed to transform his environment towards a just and equitable society. Furthermore, when read with Berger's theorisation, this representation of apocalypse is akin to "eschaton", the clearing away of the world as it is. However, given the narrative ends here, and does not offer a vision of the post-apocalypse, *Thirteen Cents* moves the location of the critique of the social order (as envisioned by Berger's theorisation) into the moments prior to the world's end. This prevents the so-called trace of the old world from being passed on into the new transformed temporality and therefore imagines Fanon's psychological disavowal of colonialism by offering a *tabula rasa* beyond the pages of the novel.

However, this produces a paradox, as the set of representations offered here are rendered inadequate in imagining what a new transformed society looks like, and so the text casts the reader back, scouring the text for the apocalypse's explanatory function. The city of Cape Town itself at various moments in the text is held responsible for the smorgasbord of social ills that have been inflicted on Azure. Vincent remarks to Azure early in the narrative that "Cape Town is fucked up. Really.... And the people. Don't forget about the people" (46). This sequencing implies a linear causality; that the city of Cape Town provides a foundation for people to exploit, manipulate and violate others. Following Tšhloane's reading of space in the novel, the solution provided was the utopian idealism imbued in Azure's mountain sanctuary. This is shown in the foreshadowing of Cape Town's destruction produced in Azure's dream state. He meets Sarah Baartman in his dreams, and the two of them together watch a "T-Rex" tear apart Cape Town (146). In this moment together, Sarah Baartman tells Azure that he will grow up to become a "T-Rex" as well, continuing the novel's discourse of futurity and predicting the novel's apocalyptic ending. Given the novel's first-person narrative perspective, tautologically it is the case that the observation of Cape Town's destruction is produced by Azure's perspective. However, nature is responding directly towards his subjectivity, as he wills the storm and its waves to go "[f]aster, faster" (191). Consequently, the destruction of Cape Town is the fulfilment of Azure's subjectivity, the moment in which he casts off his childhood and becomes the "T-Rex" that destroys Cape Town. This surreal, symbolic logic of the text is disorienting, preventing easy identification between the real of the novel and the surreal of Azure's imagination. As per Warnes on magical realism, it is a:

mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural... in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural are coherently represented in a state of equivalence.
(Warnes 3)

This representational strategy of blurring the signs that preclude the reader from an easy understanding of the real and the surreal produces a state of equivalence between the natural and the supernatural. In effect, the narration imbues both with the possibility of the redescription of the space of Cape Town. As such, the novel's explanatory intervention through apocalypse is read as a commentary on the exploitation of space and nature itself. Tšehloane argues that "[t]he text resolves the dilemma through a pastoral solitude of the mountain sanctuary. This mountain sanctuary exists outside the harsh realities of capitalist modernity and its instrumentalist values" (92). As such, the apocalypse seeks to intervene against the mode of neoliberal governance that facilitated the exploitation of Azure's body and instead advance a "total withdrawal from conventional society ... alongside the cataclysmic demise of the world" (92). As established in previous chapters, the novel engages representations of ideologies of neoliberalism to perform their critique through the speculative mode. As such, I demonstrated here how apocalypse is established to facilitate a critique of neoliberalism, where the pastoral space of the mountain transforms Azure, and allows for the imaginative destruction of Cape Town, echoing Fanon's call for decolonization through a complete psychological disavowal of colonial structures.

HISTORY AND APOCALYPSE IN CAPE TOWN

IDHTBTW is a cautionary tale towards understanding the ramifications of ecological collapse in Cape Town. The novel details the inevitable collapse of civilisation as fermented by environmental catastrophe, and examines a myriad of social issues resonant with contemporary South African and global discourse. The issues range from the relationship between race and sexuality, religion and sexuality, socio-economic precarity, and AI and augmented reality. It is written in third person narrative perspective in the novel's past, a temporality that resembles the contemporary present outside the story-world, beginning just after Cape Town's near miss with #DayZero. The reader follows the subjective experiences of Luthando, Viwe and Malcolm (three queer men in Cape Town), and in its apocalyptic future (or the present temporality of the novel), the reader follows the first person narration of Luthando's adopted (and Viwe's biological) son Milo. All three men are connected in some way by their care and compassion

towards environmental issues. This drives the central conflict in the novel between their efforts (some more noticeable than others) to combat climate change via lobbying, protests and guerilla planting (and sabotage). This section will be read alongside an understanding of Berger's second formulation of apocalypse, as indicating a historized end to one way of living or being, and commencing a subsequently *sui generis* ontological epoch.

As the narrative begins, the reader is introduced to the protagonists and their occupations at a reforestation festival just outside Cape Town. Luthando is a software engineer working towards an ethical implementation of augmented reality software. Viwe is an architect who has competing interests in terms of developing projects that "green" city buildings (green used as a verb), as well as contributing towards the development of The Citadel, a private security estate that instantiates itself as a site of privilege as the story-world slowly descends into the apocalyptic wasteland that becomes known as Kapelitsha Island. Malcolm, Luthando's best friend and fellow software engineer, is also working on *New Life* with Luthando, but eventually moves onto dream-tagging in the later stages of the narrative, working on integrating new AR (augmented reality) technology.

The novel showcases what Van der Vlies would argue is the city's "accommodation with globalisation and neoliberalism...that correlates to global responses to post-Fordist precarity" (8). Climate refugees are deposited in the harbour of Kapelitsha Island (formerly Cape Town City Bowl). The name is an "Africanised" clipping of "iKapa" and "Khayelitsha", showcasing how the novel redefines space in the city. As ecological collapses creeps in, urban life in Cape Town is increasingly polarised along lines of class, as the name "Kapelitsha Island" denotes the movement of Cape Town's peripheral townships into the space previously defined by its affluence. Cape Town is in this sense swallowed up by its "dormitory suburbs" (Turok). The novel uses a class privilege binary to highlight social inequality and the unequal impact of climate change, with the last vestige of privilege located atop Signal Hill—where the Citadel was constructed—contrasted against the wasteland of "Kapelitsha Island" below it. Additionally, the companies that the protagonists work for are imbricated in flows of global capital. For example, Malcolm's efforts at dream-tagging eventually produce an app for processing traumatic memories. The company he works for, BetaMinds, sells the app to an American security company called FeelSafe, whose interest in the app is not directed towards alleviating trauma, but towards the removal of people's memories to prevent insurgencies, resistance and social outrage. As such, this inserts a discussion of the relationship between

“planetary transformations” and the persistence of capital even in the *longue durée* of environmental apocalypse.

In discussing the relationship between temporality and the representations of the futurity of apocalypse in *IDHTBTW*, I make use of McBride’s characterisation of the novel’s narrative structure. McBride writes:

After introducing readers to Milo on the island, the narrative rewinds to approximately 15 years into the future and is organized as a countdown to “The Change”, an unnamed apocalyptic event. This countdown is broken into sections narrating the different stories of three queer friends as they navigate an increasingly unstable world before the impending climate collapse. Interspersed throughout are flashforwards to Milo on the island. This fractured temporal context and the spatial divide between Kapelitsha and the Citadel hints at a “dyadic world”. (7)

This narrative structure bifurcates the novel into a time before and a time after, and the use of a “countdown” creates dramatic irony as the reader knows of the eventual wasteland before the characters, and therefore showcases anxiety towards the future. This historicizes the framing of apocalypse theorised by Berger. These transformations of the city correspond with Berger’s reading of apocalypse. In particular, Berger’s second definition is generative for examining *IDHTBTW* as the post-apocalyptic imagery is produced by the degeneration of space through time. This produces a kind of future history, in which the novel reads the slow collapse of Cape Town from its future temporality via the primary witnessing of its destruction from the novel’s three protagonists, Luthando, Viwe and Malcolm. In *IDHTBTW*, the novel does not insert a specific cataclysmic event that reduces the city of Cape Town to its imagined impoverished state represented by “Kapelitsha Island” (a hideous clipping of Cape Town and Khayalitsha that symbolically perpetuates neoliberal conceptions of space). Instead, the novel offers a steady decline, with increased droughts, vicious wildfires and rising sea levels. Given the novel alternates between the temporality of the “post-apocalypse” and the moment before “the end”, this showcases the irrepresentability of apocalypse, or cataclysm, or in Berger’s words “eschaton”. Therefore, withholding the spectacle of the imagined end and instead beginning with the representation of the “moment after” produces “confused temporal sequencing”. The writer and reader have to be in both places at the same time, at once imagining the post-apocalyptic world and then also remembering the world before. However, what is constant, to

borrow Jameson's refrain, is the belief that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. This is shown by the persistence of neoliberalism into the novel's imagined future, as represented by the hegemony of the Citadel over the rest of Kapelitsha Island.

Luthando's narrative is characterised by his attempts at activism in order to combat climate change. He organizes a climate protest marching down towards Parliament in Cape Town, a protest that radicalises him due to the unjust nature of the protests consequence (he loses his job and is subject to a vicious smear campaign online). When his protest fails, he launches a provocative and polemical online campaign using QR codes posted all over Cape Town, that masquerade as a competition. Instead of prizes, the QR codes portray portentous images of climate apocalypse and a link to facilitate donations to environmental charities. Luthando's activism becomes even more insurgent as he participates in an attempt to sabotage Medupi Coal Power Station, an attempt that lands him in prison. Luthando's activism is read here as future-oriented. He is asserting what Julian Brown calls insurgent citizenship, as his dissent towards conceptions of what is lawful is aimed towards the claiming of future rights (in this case environmental rights; that those who live in the future may have the same equality and quality of environment that came before them). Neoliberalism however, manifests in the ominous third party responses to Luthando's activism (represented by counter-protesters deploying neoliberal sloganeering, as well as private armed forces usurping the function of police; forces that the novel implicates in Luthando's "doxing"). Consequently, the novel implicates a temporal bifurcation (of a time before apocalypse and a time *after*) to showcase the effects of neoliberal governance. This bifurcation produces a linear narrative structure that signifies a set of representations that *resemble* a catastrophe or an apocalypse-like event. This is achieved by the paratextual markers indicating to the reader of the impending collapse of society, with each of the narrative segments beginning with a phrase such as "*Fifteen years to go*", "*Twelve years to go*" etc. This countdown is therefore also iterative, as the narrative makes references forward in time, showing the increasingly fraught environment. This iterative narrative strategy circumvents the problem of apocalyptic representations. Berger argues that "[i]f apocalypse in its most radical form were actually to occur, we would have no way even to recognize it, much less record it" (13). As this narrative account seeks to represent the salient moments leading up to the apocalypse, it undercuts the discourse proposed by Berger of apocalyptic rhetoric as a process of making "radically other". As such, this allows for the narrative to be read as a kind of historicised descent into apocalypse, with its paratextual

countdown located between the different narrative segments offering a timeline of events that in some ways represents a stenographic account of the impending environmental apocalypse.

Furthermore, Berger's characterisation of the post-apocalypse is marked by a fundamentalist return in contrast to the "moral and epistemological murkiness of life". This fatalism is typical of the affect of disappointment that characterises the imperfect present of South Africa. McBride borrows a useful formulation for "dyadic world" that helps explicate this binary. She uses Caracciolo's definition of "dyadic world":

two spatial domains governed by profoundly different rules and standards in terms of what is physically possible, lawful, morally acceptable, what can be known and what cannot. (75)

In this way, the two spatial domains within the text (the Citadel and Kapelitsha Island), produce profoundly different *boni mores* in response to the epistemological and phenomenological rupture that occurs as a result of the *longue durée* of climate apocalypse. Within the Citadel, quality of life is highly regulated, aimed at preserving the citizens' "freedom". Conversely, the residents of Kapelitsha are regulated only by the environmental elements that mediate their lives. Their lives are reduced to a Hobbesian state of nature, at the mercy of the elements, with no possibility of state intervention, nor belonging to any kind of citizenship.

This is significant in addressing representations of apocalypse as a response to neoliberalism, because the novel offers competing responses to climate apocalypse. On one hand, there is a "redistributive, or statist model of development" shown by the policy documents Luthando and his supporters intended to hand over after their march, such as environmental land redistribution via conversions of timber plantations into indigenous forests, as well as other objectives. These strategies are undercut by the neoliberal condition Luthando finds himself in, where the actions of the state are replaced by third party interlocutors. On the other hand, the novel represents the neoliberal strategy of "containerization" shown by the construction of the Citadel as a place of security against the apocalypse, and is representative of what the novel terms "resilience infrastructure". Resilience connotes both the inevitability of the collapse brought on by the exploitation of natural resources as well as the implicit ideology of neoliberalism; that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism (Jameson). In this sense, both responses offered are "post-apocalyptic"; directed towards a

discourse of futurity. Conversely, *IDHTBTW* still allows for the possibility of critique of the existing social order by paradoxically representing Cape Town “after the end”, and thereby perpetuating aspects of neoliberal orthodoxy, as a trace of the time before persists into the time after. Finally, the ambiguity of the title produces a kind of dyadic eponym. “It doesn’t have to be this way” implies both a hope for a better “way” to address climate change and an anxiety towards the severity of climate change’s effects in a city already polarised along class divides. It mimetically produces the segregated spatial domains represented in the novel, and produces a subtle critique of the space the novel is producing. The ending itself represents the kind of affective disillusionment Van Der Vlies observes in South African Literature, as Malcolm “unplugs” from the augmented reality implants used to mediate their chaotic existence, and steps out of the Citadel and into Kapelitsha Island in search of Luthando. This representation of space and the critique of Cape Town for its spatial segregation maintained by instrumental capital bears similarity to the representation of space in *Thirteen Cents*. However, their form is different in notable ways. *Thirteen Cents* offers a singular moment of narrative apocalypse, in which the novel offers the minutiae of Cape Town’s destruction as consonant with and as a consequence of Azure’s narrative perspective. As above, this echoes the Fanonian *tabula rasa* of decolonization. However, this moment is always withheld in *IDHTBTW*. There is no moment of rupture; rather, the iterative accumulation of collapse is represented as apocalyptic over the whole temporal sequence. Like a narrative sorites paradox, the reader cannot easily determine at which point the apocalypse truly begins. This contradiction is resolved by distinguishing between an apocalyptic “way of being” (in which the characters in *IDHTBTW* are forced to adapt to the post-apocalyptic wasteland of Cape Town brought on by climate change), versus the actual “eschaton” as produced in *Thirteen Cents*. It is through this “way of being” that the novel produces its overarching tone of disappointment. It is disappointed in “this way”, in which the city is fatalistically resigned to an eventual wasteland, brought on by the process of capital accumulation through exploitation, laying the end of history on neoliberalism.

MERMAID FILLET: SEMANTIC APOCALYPSE

Berger writes: “Apocalypse is a semantic alchemical process; it burns and distils signs and referents into new precipitates”. *Mermaid Fillet* is generative in that regard as though it does not offer a typical understanding of apocalypse as represented in the previous two novels I examine, it uses the kind of apocalyptic rhetoric that Berger examines in order to offer a moment of revelation for the reader. It unmask a veil that has been cast over Cape Town, by

examining the relationship between patriarchal violence and neoliberal logics of accumulation. I do not make the claim here that *Mermaid Fillet* unmasks the pandemic of gender-based violence within Cape Town's spaces, as that is more than ably represented elsewhere; rather that *Mermaid Fillet* offers a critique of institutions or systems that facilitate this violence. This has been argued elsewhere by Stuit, saying:

As Pumla Dineo Gqola has argued in her magistral study of rape in South Africa, “[r]ape is not a moment, but a language” (28). Of course, rape is an action, a moment, although arguably the consequences never fade. But rape is, as Gqola so insightfully emphasises here, a cultural thing, too. It is made possible by the culture around the act. A culture that stays in tact largely because rapists are generally not culturally condemned to the same extent in which raped women are stigmatised. As Gqola also makes clear, breaking the silence around rape is therefore not always an option for some women precisely because they may be stigmatised by their communities, are disappointed by the criminal justice system, or are simply not believed. Laetitia, from this perspective, seems to have internalised the cultural normalisation of sexual violence and expects Michaela to do the same.

The novel then offers a cataclysmic storm that transforms the fabric of reality around Cape Town. In an act that is part condemnation, part supplication, Michaela demands that men be held accountable for their violence against women by being cleansed or else drowned in a storm of menstrual blood (48). The Goddess, the omniscient, omnipotent narrator, obliges.

And I cast my curse with fairness. Just a single drop of thick uterine blood would befall you for a microaggression. But the full menstrual storm would break the lining of the sky, rain down and drown you for more egregious assaults. Because I, in my wisdom, saw fit to cleanse the world of trash, nourish the soil and fertilise the sea. (53)

This storm transformed the ecosystem around Cape Town, producing a new species for consumption; mermaids. This sign offers many levels of interpretation, functioning mimetically to reproduce the logic of neoliberal consumption, shown primarily through Banggat. As promised by the Goddess, her curse is fair. As Banggat in their mind sexualises Laetitia, a single drop of uterine blood falls upon them (28). Furthermore, they idealise mermaid fillet perhaps more than their desire for high-end sneakers. Their non-binary gender

is performed in many strange ambivalent ways. After Banggat rescues Isaac from a yaat in Ravensmead, they manage to excavate some information that will help them find the Tamagotchi. This moment of confidence (subverting their type as a “scaredy-cat”) offers interesting self-reflection.

They used to think they were attracted to hyper-masculinity. But they didn’t want to fuck it; they wanted to *be it*. They used to think they were attracted to hyper-femininity but they didn’t want to fuck it; they wanted to *be it, too*. (81)

This moment of ambivalence is typical of the interpretive or explanatory function of apocalyptic rhetoric. Although the function of the storm’s imagery offers clearly identifiable consequences for patriarchal violence, the extent to which this violence can be performed within this paradigm is also examined. As Banggat offers an identity that moves fluidly between masculinity, femininity and an ambivalent logic of desire as their gender, the fact that they too are drowned by the storm by the end of the novel reveals that the commodification and consumption of women is located with the kinds of neoliberal ideologies that mimic Banggat’s commodity fetishism. This is shown by the resolution of their narrative, where they finally accept their commodity fetishism as their desire. Banggat convinces Michaela to go on a date with them, and they compare the idea of sex with Michaela with the consumption of mermaid fillet. As this happens, “[t]hey could feel the rain about to come. They could feel the ground shake. There was nowhere to run. Breathe. *Banggat for who?*” (210). Therefore, as Banggat directs their desire for women in the same way that they desire other commodities, the Goddess makes good on her curse and drowns (or cleanses) Banggat from the soil. This produces a symbolic critique of neoliberal logics of accumulation by associating the root cause of Banggat’s objectification of women with world in which they live; born as it were with Nike Air Jordan’s on their feet, doomed always to perpetuate cycles of commodification.

In examining *Mermaid Fillet* as synthesised representation of apocalypse, I produced a contrapuntal reading of Berger’s apocalyptic theorisations. This is because the element of apocalypse typically associated with these modes of representation, the *eschaton*—which is the moment of “clearing away the world” to make possible the post-apocalypse, has been precluded from the set of representations within the world. This is contrasted against *Thirteen Cents* and *IDHTBTW*, in which apocalypse or an apocalyptic “way of being” form a crucial aspect to the narratives. The characters within *Mermaid Fillet* continue mostly as “normal”, or

at least within the same normative framework that had existed prior to the storm. However, the storm functions within the story to facilitate apocalyptic discourse, allowing for a “study of what disappears and what remains, and how the remainder has been transformed”. The emergence of an apocalyptic discourse within the novel, as shown by *Michaela and The Goddess*, sustains a critique of the logic of neoliberalism within Cape Town and how it influences patriarchal structures and continues violence against women. Notably this is shown by the death of @M16inyourbek, Isaac’s grandmother, who maintained control of the family run organised crime syndicate that, among other things, traffics in women and so continues the cycles of abuse. When compared to *Thirteen Cents* and *IDHTBTW*, its representation of apocalypse is only discursive as opposed to temporal or spatial. Azure’s narrative apocalypse transforms the space of Cape Town; environmental apocalypse in *IDHTBTW* is a speculative “future history”. In *Mermaid Fillet*, apocalypse is used in motifs and refrains. For example, “[I] saw fit to cleanse the world of trash, nourish the soil and fertilise the sea” is repeated at both the beginning and the end of chapter two, initiating the novel’s apocalyptic discourse. Therefore, apocalypse functions semantically in *Mermaid Fillet*, to offer an interpretive tool towards understanding patriarchal violence in Cape Town.

APOCALYPSE: NOW AND THEN

Berger argues that “[p]ost-apocalyptic discourses try to say what *cannot* be said (in a strict epistemological sense) and what *must not* be said (what is interdicted by ethical, religious, or other social sanctions)” (Berger 14). This is relevant to the discussion produced here for several reasons. As above, *Mermaid Fillet* enjoins discourse on gender-based violence in Cape Town, initiating apocalyptic representations as a response. Similarly, *Thirteen Cents* uses apocalypse as a Fanonian *tabula rasa*—which as “eschaton” functions epistemologically and socially. Therefore, the two novels overlap in the scope of their apocalyptic representations, even if *Mermaid Fillet* does not fit normative conceptions of apocalypse. When contrasted with *IDHTBTW*, van der Vlies’ “affect of disappointment” emerges. This disappointment is writ large in the city of Cape Town, as shown through the subjectivities of its residents in the novels. This is shown by the representation of the Citadel, a fortress against the poverty of its environment, swallowing up Azure’s mountain sanctuary. This comparative reading showcases how neoliberalism persists past the end, and how the apocalyptic discourse of the novels envisages that persistence.

This has been developed through a discussion of *Thirteen Cents* and *IDHTBTW*, where the representations of apocalypse functioned both as a historicised framework for understanding Cape Town, and as an interpretive lens in which the logic of capitalism and neoliberalism is explicated. Additionally, *Mermaid Fillet* explicates how apocalyptic discourse functions, by saying what *cannot* or *must not* be said. Together, these texts produce a disillusioned affect, either through its narrative apocalypse of Cape Town as in *Thirteen Cents*, or through the ambiguity of the title in *IDHTBTW*, or finally through the interrogation of desire and commodification in *Mermaid Fillet*.

CHAPTER 5:

CONCLUSION: REDESCRIBING THE ORDINARY

INTRODUCTION:

The three novels articulate differing beliefs within the multiple Cape Town's represented here, and some of the novels over-determine Cape Town's identity based on the spaces inhabited, as two of these novels are primarily set within the space of the City Bowl. This is contrasted against representations of Cape Town, such as *Mermaid Fillet*, that from the outset recognizes the multiplicity of identity as framed by space. The significance of my approach in reading these novels together is that they produce differing dystopic visions of the city of Cape Town as constituted through tropes of apocalypse and utopia. This dystopia disorders the assembled logic of the city, which Samuelson describes as configured by the apartheid logic that forcibly moved its "black and coloured residents" to the Cape Flats, and lingering oppressive ideology maintained by the spatial assemblage of the city of Cape Town.

Speculative fiction in Cape Town encompasses supposedly temporal markers as conceptual. Frenkel in "South African Literary Cartographies: a post-transitional palimpsest" addresses three novels that she argues typify the movement from transitional to post-transitional, and similarly speculative fiction in Cape Town mirrors this movement. According to Frenkel, the textual is an act of discourse that "both creates and circumscribes the material world" (Frenkel 26). Frenkel argues for the "fecundity" of reading texts in a palimpsestic fashion, such that literatures of the urban map a relationship between "space, place and situated transnationalism", in order to show how "one transitional experience is already present in another" (emphasis my own). Literature of the transition (which she argues is typified by Mpe's *Welcome to Hillbrow*- and similarly I characterise *Thirteen Cents* this way) is characterised by "buried histories, the legacies of resistance, suppressed conceptions of identity, and the deployment of nuance to describe ordinary life" (Frenkel 26). In the case of speculative fiction in Cape Town, the form allows for the material reimagining of the city such that readers receive the text as both allegorical and representative. For example, I read the futurity within *Thirteen Cents* encompassed within its apocalyptic discourse, as although the

novel is not mediating the present from the perspective of the future, the novel utilizes a surreal narration to destabilize representation, to the extent that the only resolution is the narrative apocalypse articulated in earlier chapters. This destabilization results in Azure's continuous mode of "becoming", in the sense that he feels as though he is always on the cusp of "manhood". Although Azure's desires appear to be located in a secure future, he is almost wholly bidden by his precarious present in order to negotiate a continued survival. This temporal dislocation is typical of the "affect of disappointment" that Van der Vlies argues characterises South African literature post-apartheid, and in many cases this affect is a response to neoliberal economics that typify South African cities. This reading helped establish the formal movement between the interregnum, the transition and the post-transition, as each of these moments are characterised by literature on the "cusp" of something, akin to van der Vlies' formulation of "waithood". This formulation of waithood draws on *Cruel Optimism*, and thus strengthens Frenkel and Mackenzie's examination of these categories as *conceptual* and not solely temporal (Frenkel and Mackenzie 4).

The relationship between present and future is articulated via a discussion of the conceptual labels used as interventions in South African literature, as well as through an examination of affect as produced by Van der Vlies' engagement with Benjamin and Berlant. This is applied to a close reading of these novels set in Cape Town, as this city sustains its interpretation as a liminal space, a space of contradictions, where representations of apocalypse and utopia can exist side by side. My examination of apocalypse and utopia was utilised towards understanding the embedded neoliberal ideologies present in the subjectivity of Cape Town. As such, my analysis paralleled Ndebele's challenge to examine the extent that the novels addressed here "free the entire social imagination of the oppressed from the laws of perception" (Ndebele 67). However, speculative fiction complicates Ndebele's challenge and therefore examine the futurity of neoliberal practices in Cape Town represented in speculative fiction through the ambiguity of their allegorical modes of representation.

HISTORY-MAKING

Van der Vlies argues in the introduction to his monograph *Present Imperfect* that "the present was the end-point of a narrative of progress but that narrative might not end up mapping onto the lived experiences that would follow; the present was but a moment in a narrative whose end would always be unpredictable" (Van der Vlies 5). Van der Vlies further argues that this

characterisation of the present, with respect to conceptions of narratives of progress as critiqued by Walter Benjamin, produces a temporal affect of disappointment. This is because Benjamin maintains a suspicion of progress narratives. Benjamin compares conceptions of history as represented by a universal historicist and a historical materialist. The universal historicist, in Hegelian fashion, relegates the past to the “dustbin of history” and maintains the inevitability of progress alongside time’s forward march (Van der Vlies 7). The historical materialist however, always resuscitates the past to be included in the present, presenting a configuration of past and present as in constellation with one another. This is useful for Van der Vlies’ engagement with Benjamin as it produces an “anteroom” where one could wait in anticipation of the “revolution”. For this reason, my analysis began with *Thirteen Cents*, as it resuscitated the past through Azure’s dreamlike narration; however, the novel’s resolution in destroying Cape Town showcases a *prima facie* disappointment with the city. It was not enough to wait for a better future, the excavate the past. The present needed rewriting. This formulation resonates with my analysis of *Thirteen Cents*, as shown further. Azure in his dreams atop his mountain enclave meets Sarah Baartman (who is referred to by her derogatory nomenclature- which shall not be repeated here). Azures’ dreamlike narration returns Sarah Baartman from her captivity in Europe (“I have come from very far...[m]aybe over the ocean.”-144) to her home here in Cape Town (“This is home for me.” -144). This signals the novel’s attempt to reclaim a buried history, and not only reclaim, but refashion. Speculative fiction of the *transition* uses the form of a genre unmoored from the hegemony of the real to refashion a history consigned to the annals of history by colonial narratives of progress, and instead shows in this case that one transitional experience *is* present in another (Sarah Baartman’s return to South Africa was similarly achieved posthumously in the contemporary moment of this novel’s publication).

This is contrasted against *IDHTBTW* as the novel offers a useful intervention within the narratological framework of impending apocalypse. Whereas Berger examines three conceptions of apocalypse (“eschaton” or the actual imagined end of the world; a set of catastrophes that resemble an imagined final ending; and apocalypse as interpretive of explanatory), *IDHTBTW* offers a countdown towards the actual imagined end of the world, where the apocalyptic wasteland precedes the actual imagined end of the world. In this way, apocalypse happens incrementally and not all at once. This produces a *longue durée* of apocalyptic history making, instantiating a temporal framework that mimics chronological historical narratives. Although my reading of the novel loosely follows Berger’s framework,

the novel dives in and out of theory in generative ways. This diversion produces difference in terms of the discourse of futurity this narrative approach produces. The linear chronological countdown imbues the novel with the kind of history making critiqued by Benjamin. Even though the novel aims to represent the end of the present moment of history given the contrast between its iterative, stenographic chronology and the manner in which that history-making is imbued in the subjectivities of the characters, this critique enables the end of the world to precede the end of capitalism. As such, the two novels approach the temporal-conceptual divide in a manner at odds with each other.

CRUEL OPTIMISM'S SPECULATIVE FORM

This temporal and conceptual relationship in the novels was developed through the overarching framework of Berlant's "Cruel Optimism", in which "[a] relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing... They become cruel only when the object of your desire that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (Berlant 1). It may seem strange to attach so strongly an affective structure of disappointment towards novels that figure a certain optimism towards the *future*. Azure's motivations, despite being located in the eternal present of his precarity, are directed towards a future time in which he becomes "a man". This will overcome the obstacle towards his current flourishing, which he perceives as his childhood located within structures of patriarchal, misogynistic violence. However, it is this iteration of masculinity that figures as the hegemonic, homogenous concept that renders his life fragile, and therefore characterises his present as eternally disappointed, disillusioned. Masculinity in *Thirteen Cents* is violent, predatory and exploitative. Azure's stated desire towards the future, this hegemonic masculinity, can never be attained by a *progressive* understanding of temporality. He accords himself manhood on his thirteenth birthday, a moment of cognitive dissonance for any reader, and disrupts normative conceptions of time. This rupture conceives of time as incremental but not linear, and this is further supported by Azure's dream state reaching into the past in order to revive the subjectivity of Sarah Baartman.

Similarly, in *IDHTBTW* the novel estranges the reader with the interspersed narrative voice of Milo from the future. This produces dramatic irony as the reader knows of the futility of our protagonists efforts in addressing climate change, and disrupts the linearity of the history-making process. When read alongside the frameworks of Berlant and Van Der Vlies, the

novel's affective disappointment with the value structure of neoliberalism resonates with the ideas of "Cruel Optimism", as the characters' flourishing is prevented by their activism. Therefore, the novel's interplay between the trope of utopia/dystopia as a response to the impending ecological collapse showcases the futility of neoliberalism in addressing the climate apocalypse.

In contrast to the other novels, *Mermaid Fillet* produces a liminal space within which the events of the novel occurs, despite its detailed itinerary of narrative events (shown by its paratextual date and time markers). This is because the narrative entraps the reader, constantly moving back and forth between different narrative elements and perspectives. This is done by the narrating of multiple events from different narrative perspectives. This "multiperspectivity" is generative in unpacking the effect of neoliberal ideologies on the cultural imagination within Cape Town. As such, the *novum* of the novel (the storm of menstrual blood that rains on men in Cape Town) functions as explanatory, interpretive or interventionist. The novel engages the problem of widespread systemic violence against women and uses the interpretive framework of the storm to facilitate this critique. The storm aims to wash away the violence of men, and this act of cleaning or nourishing Cape Town bears resemblance to the role in which water played in reconfiguring Cape Town in *Thirteen Cents*. When coupled with the sustained critique of neoliberalism through the novel's representation of commodity fetishism, the novel's surreal narrative techniques estrange the reader, and in so doing reveals the concealed value structures within the city of Cape Town. Read together, these novels utilize their formal elements to produce the affect of disappointment identified by Van Der Vlies in South African literature and the relation of cruel optimism that exists within the City of Cape Town, as a location of opportunity as well as exploitation.

APOCALYPTIC TRANSITIONS

Alistair Mackay's novel warning of impending environmental collapse engages a broad range of subject matter. In chapters three and four I examined the competing and related tropes of apocalypse and utopia in the novel. These tropes are useful analytics for unpacking how the form of the novel reconfigures the space of Cape Town, and how this reconfiguration is mediated by conceptions of neoliberalism. As per Eagleton, "concealed structures of values which informs and underlies our factual statements is part of what is meant by 'ideology'." This formulation is generative as the genre of the novel (speculative fiction) allows for the

concealed structure of values in the city of Cape Town to be brought for examination. Reciprocally, the subjectivity of the city of Cape Town that emerges also mediates the value structure inherent in the novel. The novel reproduces relationships of privilege based on class and race, while also offering a critique of the neoliberal value system that has produced the ecological collapse represented in the novel. This entanglement between networks of privilege, ideological value systems and spatial transformations highlights the enduring legacies of modern capitalism. This is because its deployment of utopian/dystopian tropes (like the Citadel and Kapelitsha Island) are used in an instrumentalist manner and conform with Jameson's assessment of a Stalinist utopia in which uniformity and purity are imposed forcefully on reluctant subjects. In this way, to borrow Jameson's refrain once more, the novel imagines the end of the world and yet not the end of capitalism.

Where *IDHTBTW* offers a homogenous representation of Cape Town divided inequitably along wealth and poverty, *Mermaid Fillet* intervenes in the cultural imagination of Cape Town by insisting on the plurality of experiences and subjectivities that are located and circulated by the city. This is emphasised by the novel's paratextual markers such as the list of "types". As per Brown-Luthango and Samara, certain geographic locations in the city are marginalized in terms of service delivery, especially in terms of the allocation of resources towards safety and security. Brown-Luthango analyses this in terms of transit-oriented development, focusing on Voortrekker Road. *Mermaid Fillet* occupies suburbs serviced by Voortrekker Road, and in the cultural imagination of Cape Town produced by the neoliberal ideologies examined by Turok and Bickford-Smith, these suburbs do not feature as representative of Cape Town. Instead, Bickford-Smith observes the tourist imagination of Cape Town, with symbols like the Waterfront and Table Mountain dominating. *Mermaid Fillet* addresses this binary, using apocalyptic imagery and the narrative perspective of the Goddess to produce a rich and varied examination of Cape Town, such as its deployment of "yaadt" to excavate the subjectivity of Capetonians in the Northern Suburbs, as well as to critique the "festive-is-fokol" attitude that descends in December. This highlights and critiques the bifurcation present in the cultural imagination of Cape Town, as indicated by the Goddess:

Every Bellville has a Bellville South, every Rondebosch has an Athlone, every Maitland has a Kensington. There are two Cape Towns. That's easy to forget. (224)

This segues back to *Thirteen Cents* as the novel insists on the bifurcation within the city via its conception of space. It utilises the form of a first person narrative of a homeless child on the streets of Cape Town, primarily functions as representation of Azure's interiority, his subjectivity as a young black child on the cusp of manhood. In this respect, it is clear to see how the novel engages the challenge of Ndebele's rediscovery of the ordinary. It rejects a narrative of protest literature, instead favouring ambiguity and surrealism in order to examine the tensions at the heart of a project of transition in a space determined by its functionality as a flow of capital towards leisure, pleasure, violence and corruption. Azure's subjectivity is always under threat by these characteristics of Cape Town, whether by the exploitation by white men towards their own paedophilic hedonism, or by gangsters utilizing sexual assault as a means of exerting power and control over Azure's subjectivity. The significance of this reading is to instantiate how these forms of violence are not in any way *exceptional*, defined in opposition to Cape Town's outward representation as idyllic, but instead as consonant with the City of Cape Town. However, it entrenches this representation as typical of the transitional period in South Africa's cultural history, and therefore showcases the difficulties of rediscovering a Black subjectivity outside of structures of violence aimed at repressing that subjective experience. In this way the novel engages in a textual discourse that creates or circumscribes its "world", as this representation is made via Azure's narration, a narration imbued with the power to create (in this case his act of creation is directed inwards, he wills himself to "be a man") or to destroy (remake), shown by the apocalypse he wills upon the city of Cape Town. These three novels are unified by their deployment of apocalyptic rhetorics in order to mediate the space of Cape Town,

FOR THE LAST TIME

I undertook an examination of three novels set in Cape Town in the period subsequent to our country's emergence from Apartheid. I argued here that speculative fiction maintains its utility by showcasing how the shift in genre allows for a reciprocal examination of the city in literature and literature in the city. This symbolic mode also allows for a fresh and unique transformation that mediates the reader's engagement with the city of Cape Town. I argued based on an examination of the tropes of apocalypse and utopia that the genre reflects a growing concern with neoliberalism and its affective consequences. Therefore, I examined the representational strategies deployed in the novels to showcase the dynamic transformations present in Cape Town, alongside a static mirroring of its lack of transformation post-Apartheid. This allowed

for an examination of the concealed value structure of neoliberal ideologies that were either repudiated, reconfigured or perpetuated by the novels I examined. In the case of *Thirteen Cents*, the novel's bleak and traumatic tone suggests the beginning of the disillusionment with the South African city that van der Vlies argues is typical of South African Literature post-Apartheid. *It Doesn't Have To Be This Way*, which occupies the same physical space as *Thirteen Cents*, perpetuates this disillusionment with its fatalistic warning, as despite its tonal urgency and activism-rich ethos, the novel fails to sufficiently critique the insidious logic of neoliberal instrumentalism. *Mermaid Fillet*, in contrast to either novel, locates an ambivalence towards either an ethos of social justice or a reformulated blank slate of the city. The novel relies heavily on characterisation to develop something approaching the subjectivity of the city. In this way, it critiques how the development of Cape Town post-apartheid only served to increase the feeling of bifurcation of the city. While this has been ably examined by urban theorists, as reflected in my analysis elsewhere, it reminds us of fiction's utility more generally. Cities bring people together through their distinct flows of capital. However, people have always been brought together by stories as well. This appears consonant with Ndebele's thesis on the role of literature to rediscover the ordinary. In this manner, despite the separation from the real by its additional symbolic mode, I argued that these novels paralleled Ndebele's challenge. This is despite the novels' movement between the interiority of the characters subjective experience and the hegemony of the social totality that functions as the exterior sign. Rather, the symbolic mode captures the richness of the reality in which these characters circulate. Therefore, spatiality as produced in these novels uses stories as well as capital to assemble and distribute people throughout the city of Cape Town. The characters have a vexed and contradictory relationship to the city, and are united by their determination to wait in the present; in the anteroom of disappointment.

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