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A TREE ON A SIDEWALK _TWILIGHT STORIES

URBAN SCRIPTING IN JOHANNESBURG

DR. SOLAM MKHABELA

ABSTRACT

The paper introduces the concept of Urban Scripting, advocating for audio visual storytelling as a transdisciplinary approach to site assessment in a complex African urban context. Here, life 'as is,' particularly on the street, is often not understood as fertile planning grounds. Methodologically, the exploration aims to develop narrative-making procedures that provide a relevant framework to evaluate such multi-layered situations and settings as something 'that is' and 'could be' instead of something that shouldn't.
The work contributes to the discussion on how observing, understanding and telling urban life 'otherwise' might close an existing knowledge gap between a spectrum of end users and professional practice. A composite of a documentary and animation film around a tree on a sidewalk in Johannesburg's Alexandra Township (Mkhabela, 2024) serves as a narrative reference to illustrate the approach's output methodologically. By visualising the invisible, the work claims that the reframing of thematic sequences opens alternative and imaginary pathways for thinking and shaping the global South's diverse temporal and spatial realities, where the vulnerability of the many is often anchored in the absence of imaginaries – not their own, but 'official' ones.

INTRODUCTION

The paper explores the concept of Urban Scripting as a methodology for re-evaluating urban landscapes, particularly in marginalised spaces like Alexandra Township in the north of Johannesburg. The study employs audio visual storytelling as a transdisciplinary approach to site assessment within the complex urban context of Africa, where top-down methods frequently misinterpret the realities of life on-site, undermining effective planning. The exploration aims to develop narrative-making procedures as a methodology that provides a relevant framework for evaluating such multi-layered situations and settings.
Theoretically, the work draws from calls by literary and spatial theorists like Klaske Havik (2021, 2017, 2012), Achille Mbembe (2018, 2015), and Leonie Sandercock (2003b, 2000, 1998). These scholars advocate for a new approach to narrative analysis that goes beyond traditional close reading and interpretation. This approach focuses on understanding the various ways narratives can "do things" in the world—how they intervene and take action in everyday life.
The work contributes to the discussion in academia and practice on how observing, understanding and telling urban life 'otherwise' might close an existing knowledge gap between a large spectrum of end users and professional practice. A film around a tree on a sidewalk in Alex – as Johannesburg's oldest township is widely called – produced by Mkhabela serves as a narrative reference to illustrate the approach's output in application.
The 17-minute audio visual production merges documentary film and animation techniques (Figure 1), showcasing the tree's survival in a challenged environment through the perspective of Bra Niky, an 'all-life resident' of the area whose expertise gives a view of subaltern life in Alexandra. The methodology's semantic structure places Bra Niky, with his experience and knowledge, as the main narrator, in a position to shift the frame to urban spaces that are often overlooked in conventional planning and design processes.
Bra Niky tells the story of these spaces remade by people as the operational base of their lives, surrounding the tree as micro-architectures and turn into reflective surfaces of the environment itself (Figure 1). As local places, they mirror the complex makings of an emerging spatial practice that questions hostile officialdom and highlights the ingenuity and restrictions of DIY urbanity.




Figure 1. Tree on a sidewalk in Alexandra, Johannesburg, Bra Niky in The Twilight Zone, Screenshots Left 2:57;14; Right:7:44:20

Other African voices join Bra Nicky, and together they retell the story of Johannesburg from the precarious position of in-between, coined the twilight zone. Conceptually and pragmatically, the twilight zone straddles the domain between officially legal and by-law breaching on-the-ground operations. The film positions twilight intelligence through one tree that contextualises the materiality of survival and resistance in a challenged system. This reframing develops into an alternative urban script – an edited version of life as lived – and considers the practice of retelling as imaginary pathways for thinking and shaping the diverse temporal and spatial realities in Alexandra, Johannesburg, and the Global South. Here, the vulnerability of the many is often anchored in the absence of imaginaries – not their own, but 'official' ones.

Performing as a bottom-up push of the street, this, at times, forensic visual sequence recalibrates close reading and interpretation of the multiple ways in which narratives "do things"—how they intervene in the world and take action in everyday life. The work claims visual narratives have the capacity to see and think about things and tell an 'otherwise' account. Audio visual stories are an essential part of analytical readings of site, where knowledge from the ground up is often lacking in official recordings.
Building on Robert Scholes's humane semiotic approach, this methodology integrates disseminating the insights from its grounded analyses. In other words, it prioritises sharing the understandings derived from its detailed inquiries, which integrate empirical work on site over a three-year period from 2017 to 2019 with historical material of Johannesburg's – of Alexandra's – timeline. The focus is on five apartheid policies from 1913 to 1953, their repeal in 1990, and the introduction of a new democracy in 1994, which serve as key analytical markers in the reconstructed storyworld.

As a reading protocol (Scholes, 1989) with a particular focus on the relation between narrative theory (Caine, Clandinin & Lessard, 2022) and the moving image (Deleuze, 1992), the paper is organised into six sections. It unpacks the concept of Urban Scripting and connects the driver of this approach to a gap in literature and practice. The writing then examines this gap by highlighting the twilight zone as an emerging category that needs recognition. From there, it discusses the methodological choice to shift the frame to Bra Nicky and his tree. It details the research design through a longitudinal case study in Alexandra and discusses the relevance of the sources used.

This discussion is followed by the findings and an exploration of the role of the urban designer as a producer of audio visual spatial narratives, pointing out both possibilities and limitations.
The final section concludes with reflection on Urban Scripting as an approach and a method rooted in an African context. It emphasises the importance of giving voice to those inhabiting the streets as public spaces for social and livelihood activities, fostering a sense of empathy and understanding for subaltern communities.

URBAN SCRIPTING

The concept of Urban Scripting as a narrative and filmic contribution to urban analysis understands the methodological approach as an attempt to respond to the lack or gap in literature and practice addressed in the introduction. With the city becoming more complex in configurations of people and spaces, a pressing question arises: How can urban professionals enhance liveability in urban environments they may not fully understand? Furthermore, how can this understanding inform the development of theories and practices that reflect the ever-changing, conflict-laden realities shaped by diverse perspectives? In Narrating Urban Landscape, Klaske Havik, Bruno Notteboom, and Saskia de Wit (2017) argue that contemporary contexts present new challenges for spatial practice, notably through inadequate planning and design tools.

Simultaneously, Henk Borgdorff (2010:61) contends that grasping the nuances of urban life requires an approach grounded in "not-knowing" or "not-yet-knowing," which allows space for serendipity, for unexpected insights and possibilities – suggesting that many "things could be different." This combination of a complex urban environment, insufficient tools for understanding and the need for adaptive strategies create a knowledge gap in spatial practice. Johannesburg, characterised by its diversity (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2008), serves as an illustrative case in addressing the question: "What kinds of knowledge do planners need in a postmodern age marked by fragmentation, polarisation, and 'difference' in its many forms?" (Sandercock, 1999:533). Urban Scripting introduces a semantic structure – a framework for imagining, visualising and articulating the city's development to tackle this issue.

Designed to be accessible beyond elitist institutions, this semiotic system offers signposts and access codes to the diverse narratives of various authors, is relevant at different scales, and addresses the complexities of multicultural societies. It documents everyday life while providing imagined extensions that guide spatial practice. To address the existing gap, Urban Scripting employs the frame as a conceptual, practical and theoretical device to capture narratives involved in the daily transformation of the contemporary city.

Urban Scripting describes an Nguni-rooted approach to creatively interpreting and documenting the conditions of a city through reading and listening. This method primarily uses audio visual storytelling as a key and critical format for production. Audio visual storytelling establishes a transdisciplinary site reading process and consequent assessments in landscapes of extreme socio-spatial complexity, contingency, and emergent insurgency. Conventional methods interweaved with experimental and improvisation uncover the necessity for 'other' knowledge to reflect on theorising and making the city.

The mix premises that longing for liveable cities requires improving urban situations for sidelined communities, recognising an assemblage of differences as unrealised possibilities. Johannesburg, one of the most unequal cities in the world (COGTA, 2020), is a case study to engage and explore the city from the margins. The methodology employs human-centred and accessible, familiar tools as communication practice. It does this by calibrating an artistic storytelling process with deep cultural insights to unearth the twilight zone, address people's needs, and help close a growing knowledge gap between bottom-up and top-down planning and design processes (Sandercock, 1998).
Drawing on Gilles Deleuze's (1992) cinematic theory of the movement-image, this approach conceptualises life – experienced and captured at 24 frames per second – street entrepreneurs are the actors who epitomise the essential survival nature of economic activities in the colonial city of Johannesburg.

Commonly, problematically, and erroneously referred to as informal traders, these actors straddle an as-yet undefined area since they are unregulated by the state and work in spaces, according to officialdom, not designed for trading. Their work invents ways of operating and surviving in "grey spaces ... [which are] ... partially outside the gaze of state authorities and city plans" (Yiftachel, 2011:153). In this essay, these 'in-between' spaces, often overlooked by conventional city planning and urban design processes, are dubbed 'the twilight zone' and form the surface of its investigation and filmic focal point.

As with Roy (2009), 'informality' is defined as a twilight sector that covers a spectrum of production modes, social conditions, and constantly adapting entrepreneurship. Furthermore, this 'informality' engages economic opportunities in constant flux, continually pivoting, and not necessarily regulated, documented, or determined by the state. Accordingly, this 'twilight zone' aligns with Yiftachel's "grey space" concept:

> *"The identification of 'grey spacing' as a ceaseless process of 'producing' social relations by-passes the false modernist dichotomy between 'legal' and 'criminal,' 'oppressed' and 'subordinated,' 'fixed' and 'temporary.' As such, it can provide a more accurate and critical lens … to analyse the making of urban space in today's globalising environment, marked by growing mobility, ethnic mixing, and political uncertainty" (Yiftachel, 2011:153).*

Building upon Donileen R. Loseke's (2022) idea of the narrative turn, which she defines as "understanding the centrality of stories in the activities and processes of meaning-making" (Loseke, 2022:xiii), this approach addresses significant social changes alongside current challenges in research practices. Loseke's perspective shapes the guiding philosophy of this text, its application, and its storytelling component. This work employs an epistemic framework of in-betweenness to examine storytelling's transformative potential as a valuable method for site assessment, especially in the challenging contexts of extreme socio-spatial inequality, while highlighting emergent forms of resistance. The fusion of Nguni oral traditions (as local expertise) with traditional mapping cultures and innovative audio visual media techniques (as specialist expertise) serves to advocate for Othered knowledge systems that have historically been marginalised, overlooked, and undervalued, ensuring that they are included and amplified in the urban planning process.

Employed in Johannesburg, Urban Scripting calibrates the city's writing using three actions: framing, shifting and positioning. This tripartite lens calibrates spatial dynamics from the twilight zone – the spaces designed to be inhabitable in a conventionally defined way but remade daily by the Others who are forced because of their marginalised circumstances to recreate them for daily enterprises.

Their on-the-ground operations exist in the murky grey domain between what is officially 'allowed' and what is not, a space where people create, occupy, serve, and transform the zone on the margins of the economy, the city and society. Recently, scholars have engaged with literature discussing the emergence of twilight as a concept that exists on a spectrum. This spectrum ranges from the need for its amendment due to perceived deficiencies (Hou, 2013; Jenkins, 2013) to its potential as a new urban paradigm (Simone & Pieterse, 2017; Mbembe & Nuttall, 2008).

The existing gap in knowledge about the twilight zone's operations manifests both in theory and practice. Mbembe and Nuttall highlight this issue when they describe Johannesburg as the "Elusive Metropolis," emphasising "the gap between the way things actually are and the way they appear in theory and discourse" (Mbembe & Nuttall, 2008:25). This condition is often "rendered inoperative simply because we are seeing and engaging with the realities examined in a particular way" (Simone & Pieterse, 2017:11).

DETECTING TWILIGHT KNOWLEDGE

The work introduces twilight intelligence as a concept that describes in-between spaces where urban life unfolds beyond formal planning and regulatory structures under the premise that the twilight zone is an emerging category that needs recognition. The understanding of storytelling as a technique for documenting complex urban knowledges embedded in the material of the everyday emphasizes how narratives intervene in the world and influence people's lives, particularly in relation to various forms of coexistence. As such, the approach fosters imaginative reflection of spatial and temporal scenarios relevant to a particular context, the global South, but potentially applicable and relevant elsewhere where similar spatial and societal marginality exists. It addresses realities where migration and changing values, cultures, and economies are challenging established normative processes and are in the process of overwriting history as planned.

Articulated in Cosmopolis II (2004), Sandercock's theory reimagines the city's ultimately unrepresentable space as a valid life form. Extending Sandercock's theory within the context of this work, we use story as a language and translate it into spatial narratives. Story and narrating exist through the intermediary of the narrative, as process and structure, and develop as discourse by framing recounts. Urban Scripting's evolving theory hypothesises the frame as a hybrid semiotic tool that uses critical transdisciplinary ideas for a relational emergence to situate, receive and disseminate data.

In Making the Invisible Visible (1998), Sandercock emphasizes the power of history and argues that modernist planning has positioned the profession as the subject of planning. This ideology led to the notion that "only those who qualify as 'professionals' are seen as relevant historical agents" (Sandercock, 1998:7).

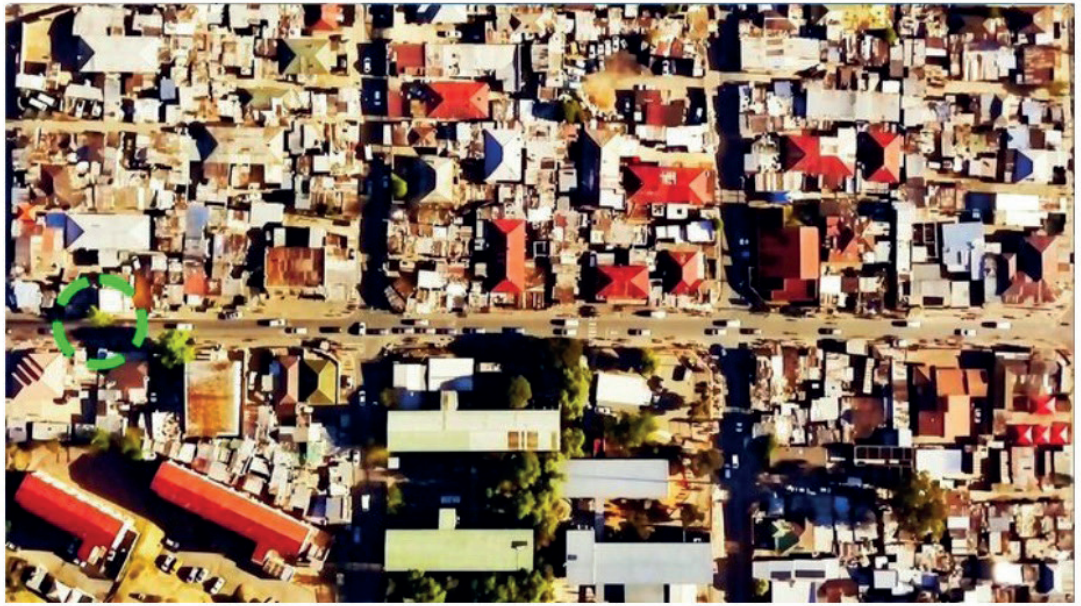


Figure 2. Aerial View of a Tree on a sidewalk in Alexandra along Rev Sam Buti Street, 1:12:03

Consequently, planning history reflects "a narrative about the ideas and actions of White middle-class men" since women and people of colour have, until recently, been systematically excluded from the profession due to their lack of access to institutions of higher education" (Sandercock, 1989:7).

Sandercock's book advocates for new, inclusive, and insurgent planning theories to challenge this dominant narrative. In response to her call, Bra Niky – the 'all life resident' of Alexandra introduced earlier in this text – shifts the frame to urban spaces remade by people as the operational base of their lives surrounding the tree. These micro-architectures, explored through a Deleuzian image as a representation of thought, turn into reflective surfaces of the environment.

Drawing on W.J.T. Mitchell's concept of the pictorial turn in verbal and visual culture (Mitchell, 1994), this frame acts as a palimpsest that peels back the landscape, revealing and mirroring the complex makings of an emerging spatial practice. This practice questions the often hostile official narratives and highlights the ingenuity and restrictions of DIY urbanity. Historically marginalised by colonial, capitalist and apartheid ideologies, subaltern practices emerge as forms of resistance that this methodology seeks to visualise and present as essential for recognition within the professional field.

Urban Scripting as an epistemological framework encourages a fitting and interactive communication between grassroots and institutional knowledge, providing the collaborative expertise necessary to effectively address complex and fringe situations.

THE READING PROTOCOL: VIEWPOINTS AND KEY ACTIONS

The approach shifts the reading protocol to Bra Niky and his tree as the main frame of reference. The discussion of Bra Niky's tree as a narrative device illustrates the politics of place-making and a central detail of the research design. The longitudinal case study in Alexandra between 2017 and 2019 focuses on the sources used. In this light, the tree's story and the tree's caretaker (Figure 2) become crucial elements in creating new visions for urban development in cities of the global South.
Together, they embody the diverse experiences of South Africans and immigrants in colonial settings. Their stories serve as an essential channel for spatial practices, providing valuable insights into identity, ownership, and belonging struggles. Their stories highlight local resilience and agency in a comprehensive, tangible, and authentic way, with energy and insights that we should consider and unleash to transform the city.
His, like many othered knowledges, is a vital source of the developing methodological approach described in this paper. This reading protocol provides better descriptions of Johannesburg's twilight activities to then address issues from the ground up across scales. The 17-minute audio visual production centres around a tree on a sidewalk. A carefully curated composite of documentary film and animation showcases the tree that has survived in a challenged environment and gives a view of subaltern life in Alexandra over the last hundred or so years, with a deep anchor in today's everyday life. The filmic sequence is a montage of three research outputs and chooses to depart from dominant viewpoints. Its narrative focuses on the evolution and restructuring of the urban landscape, its politics, and the varying perceptions of those who use it.
Visually articulating this transformation across genres sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the dynamics of urbanisation and the shifting relationships between built environments and the communities that inhabit them. The composite nature of the production permits building up the frame into a sequence of moving images that simultaneously uses different data collection sets, historical and recent, analysing space and its use, and reflective and reflexive practice. The analytical framework consists of three key actions: framing, shifting and positioning.

This approach, inspired by Loseke's theory (2022) and expressed through a comic and filmic style, incorporates elements of time, context, and activities. Framing relates to time. It investigates past events, exploring why they occurred and identifying the city-making tools that are effective or ineffective. This process revisits historical strategies to understand how they have shaped present-day Johannesburg. Shifting pertains to context. It examines current circumstances, seeking to understand what is happening and why while contemplating the processes involved in conceiving and creating a city. This stage reflects how past events influence today's reality. Positioning is associated with activities. It considers the potential outcomes if the established frameworks were to change in the near future while also exploring the concept of a just city. This action projects possibilities for tomorrow, informed by the insights gained from today.
The three components work together to create a sensory framework that assembles nonlinear sequences of events, incorporating past, present, and potential future occurrences. This process produces a comprehensive overview of a site and its possibilities, which is referred to as calibrating. Calibrating consists of a series of interconnected steps that unfold over time, rooted in the practice of storytelling initiated by the urban designer as both a producer of space and content. This practice emphasises transdisciplinary approaches, highlights the necessity for critical and empirical exploration that encourages innovative thinking and analysis and underscores the importance of knowledge exchange.

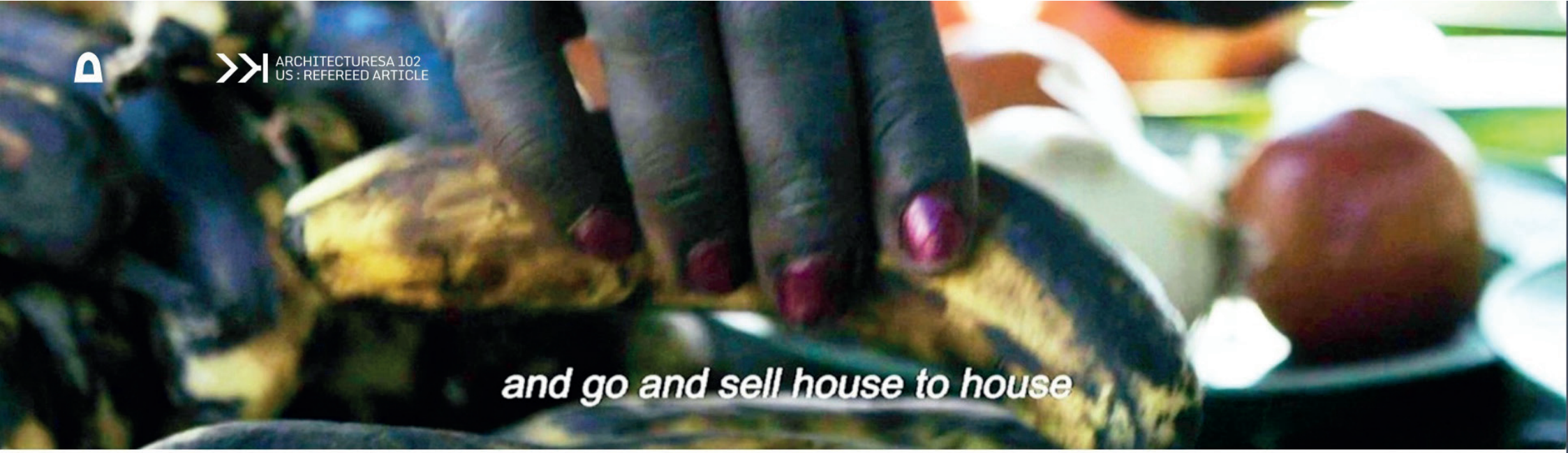


Figure 4. Rachel: "When you can't do the big business, you start with the tomato and go and sell house to house…" 1:08:54:06

A shared language is established by bringing these elements together, helping Africans recognise their value, reclaim their voice, and navigate their own path forward. Calibrating through storytelling brings the three steps together and aids, in this case, the urban designer to [re]present the past and [re]imagine the present to create future hybrid urban spaces. The movements structure a critical-reading protocol from macro, meso, and micro levels (see Figure 3).

FRAMING

Framing reads the city's history. It historicises Johannesburg by engaging and employing time to indicate notable events, such as the gold discovery that created the current city. In addition to time, framing engages with apartheid laws to read, reimagine (Sandercock, 2003b; Havik & Sioli, 2021), and recreate hybrid urban spaces (Harrison, 2006; Pieterse, 2021) within relevant timeframes. The story employs these five policies as narrative markers:

1. *The Land Act of 1913 limits Black people, who are the majority, from owning more than 8% of the land and essentially prohibits land sales between races.*
2. *The Urban Areas Act of 1923 restricts Black access to the city, which is only permitted for White servitude through "influx controls" and passes.*
3. *The Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 (later the Bantu Trust and Land Act and Development Trust and Land Act) formally separates White and Black rural areas and increases the percentage allocated to the Nguni to 13.6%, a proportion never reached.*
4. *The Group Areas Act of 1950 permits the government to segregate land occupation, designating certain geographic areas for use by a single race.*
5. *The Bantu Education Act of 1953 enables the regime to structure Nguni education separately from Whites.*

POLITICS OF MARGINALISATION

Harrison et al. (2007) find that racial segregation in South Africa can be traced back to nineteenth-century British rule. A common practice of allocating land exclusively for non-Whites around larger urban settlements was first established in Port Elizabeth in the 1850s in 'native locations.' However, this right "to own or rent land outside of defined rural 'reserves' (or homelands)" (Harrison et al., 2007:6) ceased in 1913 with the introduction of the Land Act.

It was implemented to regulate land acquisition in South Africa and had a profound impact on African traditionalism by restricting Black land ownership to just 8% of the country's surface area. It also prohibited the sale of land from Whites to Blacks and vice versa, thus making it extremely difficult for Black people to own land.

The Act also prohibited Nguni people from living on farms except as servants working for White people, primarily farmers. The thousands of Nguni people and other groups who did not qualify to stay and fell outside those permitted to remain were required to leave almost immediately. They had to either resettle in their designated 'tribal' areas or find a landowner who could employ them and obtain a permit for their stay. The Act restricted all ownership in the newly formed areas to the races designated to reside there. Post-1948 Apartheid legislation, of the official formal adoption of separate development, barred Blacks from doing business in White areas; Whites and government agencies, exempt from their own policies, could and did continue to own much of the land in designated Black areas.

Excluding the Black population from most of their ancestral arable and pastoral land forced them to relocate to industrial dormitory type areas as wage labour. Consequently, the Natives (Urban Areas) Act of 1923 designated urban areas as exclusively White and required all Black people, especially African men, to always carry permits, called dompas (dumb pass), with them. This Act enforced and served as an influx control limiting Black access to White cities. The various acts outlined essentially created a stilted urban spatial footprint based on racial segregation.

Nguni population groups were only allowed in the cities if they were in possession of a pass and forced indoors at night by curfews if they were entitled to reside in Whites-only areas. They were otherwise confined to designated areas, known as homelands, which were eventually declared 'independent' Bantustans. Subsequently, the Group Areas Act of 1950 extended the Urban Areas Act. In 1948, the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, which came into power on an election ticket of apartheid based on the idea of White supremacy, divided the country into areas based on different racial categories.



Figure 3. Urban Scripting Scales – Macro, Meso, Micro

Also passed in 1950, the Population Registration Act provided the definitions for the racial categories: native (Black or Bantu), Coloured (people of mixed race), White, and Asian (also called Indian), which was added later. The fundamental purpose of the Group Areas Act was to permit the state to dictate where races could and could not live. Authorities had the legislative power to force Blacks, who were living in what were White-desirable settings, out of these areas. Most importantly, it provided the mechanism necessary to take Black people's land for White socioeconomic interests forcibly.

Legislated in 1953, the Bantu Education Act gave the government the authority to organise and regulate the education of Nguni (native) children separately from White children. This law also introduced a standardised curriculum that prioritised Bantu culture and taught only those subjects that would benefit the government's objectives, such as preparing Black students for menial work in offices, factories, and other service structures.

The creation of the Bantustans was based on the legislation (contained) in the Land Acts of 1923 and 1936, which granted the White minority a quasi-democratic majority in the land allocated to them by classifying the Nguni majority as foreign. This 'not belonging' is because Black people lost their South African citizenship and any voting rights following the passing of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 and the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970, allowing Whites to remain in control. Thus, in less than a hundred years since the discovery of gold created Johannesburg, any Nguni descendant of the area was now essentially officially considered, if adequately documented and permitted, a foreigner or, if not, an illegal resident/immigrant.

While many other apartheid segregationist policies demeaned and reduced the Nguni, the laws identified had the most significant influence in creating the twilight zone. This is portrayed in the film when Rachel recalls, under apartheid laws, the activities she had access to after school (Figure 4). The moving frame acknowledges and emphasises coproduction forms of situated knowledge. It documents everyday street-level perspective, and its imagined extension acts as a beacon to guide informed planning practice. The awareness – premised on the concept that if spatial practice cannot see or name the problem, it can neither study nor address it – of this need to understand the street is foundational to the image-making process and knowledge coproduction.

Reading the ground and listening to people in this manner initiates a sense of Ubuntu underpinned by an onto-epistemology reiteration that "every view is a view from somewhere, and every act of speaking is a speaking from somewhere" (Abu-Lughod, 2008:53).

SHIFTING

Shifting context unveils segments of the city through meticulous and detailed documentation of the street at various scales and mediums (Figure 3). According to Hou, "Understanding the significance and characteristics of unsanctioned and unscripted spatial practices is an important step in comprehending the full complexity of . . . a wide variety of actors and processes – some formal, some not" (Hou, 2020:123). As previously observed, many of these actors and their processes operate without formal recognition or support. They exist in their work in the twilight zone. Acknowledging their practices as identified by Hou and drawing on their subaltern knowledge is a call that responds to the challenges encountered when measuring and understanding the twilight zones' vibrant insurgency (Sandercock, 1998; Miraftab, 2009; Jenkins, 2013; Pieterse, 2013; Huang et al.).

POSITIONING

Positioning focuses on what Arjun Appadurai (2003) refers to as the condition of "temporariness" that the subaltern faces and addresses it through knowledge exchange that deals with "… social, political, and moral relations and relations to the sources of power" (Appadurai 2003:47). In the contemporary city, as a tool to promote the essential elements to address "the condition of temporariness" by "creating locality" (Appadurai, 2003:47), highlighting the twilight zone conveys systems of 'tactical urbanism' (Lydon & Garcia, 2015), expresses 'practices of resistance' (Hou, 2020), and responds to the call calls for new and unorthodox assessment methods if "the potentialities of our moment are to be seized in full" (Pieterse, 2021:193).
Due to a lack of capital and property rights, twilight zone microentrepreneurs are flexible, adaptable, and innovative in their work and are good at maximising the potential they can access. This elastic strength is bricolage:

> *"A process whereby entrepreneurs with local knowledge and access to local resources are best able to create enterprises using the materials at hand, rather than overextending their efforts with externally directed attributes requiring unattainable resources. As such, entrepreneurial process elements may be emulated from successful social bricolage examples, recognising that each context, community, and circumstances will require their own unique solutions" (Preece, 2014:23).*

In Johannesburg, urban planning/design professionals often reflect 'top-down' power, exacerbated by typical professional attitudes toward urban change as needing primarily specialist knowledge. These attitudes are associated with different conceptions of space highlighted by Lefebvre, who refers to "the gap between the theoretical (epistemological) realm and the practical one, […] between the space of the philosophers, [professionals] and the space of people who deal with material things" (Lefebvre, 1991:4). This space is especially apparent in the twilight zone and in the bricolage of its microentrepreneurs, whose malleable insurgency creates self-driven opportunities.

THE URBAN DESIGNER AS PRODUCER

The study finds the urban designer in the new audio visual spatial narrative producer role, with the possibility of calibrating different knowledges and embedded limitations. In storytelling, the scriptor, as a producer and as a researcher, aims to develop 'their own' creative and operational bricolage potential and respond to changing engagement and environmental conditions by optimising the story/image gathering process. The following section discusses these aspects in a series of key points.

Producer
When making the city, expressed here through the moving image, the urban designer as scriptor/producer aims to develop 'their own' creative and operational bricolage potential and respond to changing engagement and environmental conditions by optimising the story/image gathering and disseminating process. As Hou (2020) argues, at the practical level, a deeper comprehension of the twilight zone enables us to better participate in, react to, and exploit these emergent practices for transformative spatial development results.

Viewpoints
In the twilight film, the camera sweeps across the landscape, revealing the bustling interplay of small businesses, homes, and the people who navigate the streets, their movements intertwined with the vehicles that share this space. The cinematography alternates between sweeping bird's-eye views and kinetic tracking shots, mapping out the street as the sun gradually dips, marking the passage of time. This montage not only sets the spatial stage for the film's exploration but also roots the narrative in a place that shapes its characters, giving the audience a visual foundation for the personal stories that will soon unfold.

Perspectives
The use of a drone provides an almost ethereal perspective of Alexandra – one that most of us will never experience first-hand. It allows viewers to see the community's layout and density from above and offers a fresh appreciation for the relationship between the physical space and its inhabitants. The cinematography's rhythm — shifting between distant, panoramic shots and closer, more immediate views — creates a dynamic contrast. The aerial shots offer a detached, almost omniscient perspective. In contrast, the ground-level tracking shots pull the observer back into the daily life of the community, immersing them in the details that make up the fabric of street life. This interplay of distance and proximity adds a layer of complexity to the visual storytelling that keeps the viewer engaged and invested.

Timeshifts

The film's first significant shift comes when Niky takes on the role of narrator, and with it, the medium transitions from live-action to animation – a stark departure from what we've seen so far in Figure 1. The animation, rendered in stark Black and White, evokes a nostalgic nod to Hanna-Barbera's cartoons of the mid-20th century. These were the kind of animations where backgrounds were simple, often static, drawing the viewer's attention to the characters and their exaggerated, stylised movements. It is a choice that feels (and is) deliberate, emphasising symbolism over realism, as the sequence begins with Niky standing by a tree on a sidewalk before transporting us back to the 1800s.

Co-production

Urban Scripting in the twilight zone entails a multi-layered co-production. Multiple voices and writing forms unlock the imaginaries that feed the city's twilight zones, including non-conventional disciplines and local practices that understand the significance of, for example, a tomato (Figure 4). The spatial practitioner uses his expertise to frame the context as a knowledge source in the making. This awareness-creation assists narrators and makers in enhancing communication structures premised on bridging knowledge gaps, resulting in better capture and [re]presentation of imaginaries and the real.

The Twilight Zone film does not dictate; it allows viewers' time and space to 'figure things out:' storylines, historical connections, networks, for some potentially even the film's purpose until it all makes sense. In other words, it encourages ethical participation from the audience, leading to various interpretations and misinterpretations. Having to deal with the unknown and a lack of understanding – at times, literally, the language used – is a central element in the composition of the piece. In doing so, the film simulates life [as lived], albeit in this instance as a carefully curated experience of seeing and listening. Conflicts emerge between spaces imagined and designed by Eurocentric practitioners and 21st century urban African and Nguni users, particularly the insurgent entrepreneurs who make up a significant, service-centred sub-economy.

LOCATING VOICES AS RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE BASE

This final section concludes with reflection on Urban Scripting as an approach and a method rooted in an African context that foregrounds life experience as a legitimate form of urban knowledge. The embedded critique is directed at exclusionary urban politics and policies through the lens of insurgent spatial practices, highlighting twilight intelligence as a complex and dynamic form of urban production instead of some form of disorder.

Urban Scripting places audio visual recordings of the existing situation in a pivotal position, developing an urban methodology rooted in Africa that gives voice to those inhabiting the streets as public space for social and livelihood activities. Transdisciplinary methods structure more critical and empirically on-ground evidence that inductively leads to new ways of thinking and analysing.

The methodology recalibrates close readings of the multiple ways narratives "do things" – how they intervene in the world and affect the everyday lives of those who tend to inhabit the margins of society and space in particular forms of coexistence.

The Twilight Zone (2024) demonstrates a way to learn from stories. It highlights the importance of learning from stories revealing, particularly for disadvantaged individuals, the processes of enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights to improve marginal participation in society. In addition, the film highlights progressive thinking, innovative processes, and different new methods for addressing current challenges at the local level. Programmatically and polemically, story making and telling explores how a cinematic frame is an inclusive tool within a specific set of urban processes.

These stories help to establish a relevant top-down and bottom-up approach to overseeing sidewalk micro-entrepreneurship in modern-day Johannesburg. Ultimately, its enframing application calibrates an empathetic narrative, potentially transforming lives positively and progressively for an African city in motion. Practice-based casework turns space into place, builds an anthology of empirical knowledge to inform city-making methodologies, and shapes appropriate policies that support subaltern communities. This approach is valuable for practitioners as a firm departure from convention and thrusts Black African knowledge to the forefront, thus acting as a decolonisation tool.

On a personal note. Toni Morrison says, "My language has to have holes and spaces so that the reader can come into it." Urban Scripting believes these gaps exist in the city's texture, particularly on the street and sidewalk, where Bra Niky's tree is located.
These spaces of openness have great potential for people to redirect the flow of the narrative and participate in organically making the city – and to imagine a tomorrow today, every day. Few people are interested in closing these 'holes' of knowledge and understanding and describing the street as it is – to then, literally, change the plot. This work posits that shared knowledge can happen via the power of story and storytelling – African oral storytelling meeting Western city planning as an emerging design practice.

It is very much an exercise in examining of what is omitted, unseen, unconsidered, unacknowledged and, unplanned or not designed for, yet is visible if one chooses to look, to see and to hear. Capturing street knowledge in Johannesburg The methodology recalibrates close readings of the multiple ways narratives "do things" – how they intervene in the world and affect the everyday lives of those who tend to inhabit the margins of society and space in particular forms of coexistence.means shifting the frame and including the formerly-called 'Other' and working on [re]calibrating the frame of reference.

Figure 5. Bra Niky's tree on the sidewalk



POSTSCRIPTUM:
A note on tree life.

Bra Niky's tree in the twilight zone is not a single story. As a city with over 10-million planted trees, Johannesburg's tree planting history is considered one of the most prominent people made urban 'forests' in the world. Located on the Highveld forestless grassland biome that covered the most valuable mineral layers formed over millions of years (Shorten, 1970), the city's planting of trees is marked by segregation and racial inequality as most of Johannesburg's development. Municipal efforts went into the rooting of often invasive species along the leafy streets of 'White suburbs' (Madi, 2020).
Black townships might have been initially granted climate resistant fruit trees on private plots for domestic self-sufficiency. While introduced as an 'educational' (and 'new') concept to augment the Black existence of the everyday (Calderwood, 1953:110), the local 'indigenous' fruit tree has long played a significant role in African culture and the ecosystem across the continent (Omotayo & Aremu 2019; Cemansky, 2015). Bra Niky's tree – and the storywork and storyworlds around it – have moved even further and are part of an urban narrative where the tree takes over new responsibilities and active citizenship. The tree's continued existence signifies shifting roles and responsibilities of people, plants and other species within their architectures. These architectures represent spaces (and places) where public and private movements merge, and material boundaries are renegotiated and realised.

There was an orchard here in our yard. I didn't go to buy plums, pears, or figs. No, we had everything. Grapes. We had Black and green grapes, but they were seeded... These people from outside, when they came and built shacks here, after the uprising, they just broke all those trees, and my heart was very sore…I tried to convince them to leave these trees, […] but they said no, there is no space, we are building here. But I fought for this place. They did what they did with those trees, but this tree I said, "No, this one is my best friend" That's why today it's still around here.

At some point, when you return here, you may find that I am no longer here, but the tree is. I have to fix things for my family, neighbours and community. Even when I am gone, they can name this avenue with my name.
Bra Niky, Alexandra, Interview with S Mkhabela, 2017

END NOTES

For a richer discussion, see Jenkins's argument that "there is no true binary, but perhaps more of a sliding scale of levels of formality" in Urbanization, Urbanism, and Urbanity in an African City (2013:227—231).

The Nguni have a saying, umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu, a humanist philosophical term that translates to a person being a person because of their connection to others. Phrased differently, it means I am because we are. It is also commonly referred to simply as Ubuntu. For richer access, see Desmond Tutu (2013) discussing this concept of "Who we are: Human uniqueness and the African spirit of Ubuntu," accessed October 3, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ftjdDOfTzbk.

Hanna-Barbera played a crucial role in developing an animation technique called limited animation, which made television animation more cost-effective but often resulted in reduced quality.

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