

HORIZON 2055

CITY (E)SCAPES

Colloquium Programme

Date: 03 November 2025

Time: 8:30am to 4:30pm (Followed by a cheese and wine at 4:45pm)

Venue: Drawing Room

Bird Street Gallery | Bird Street Campus | 20 Bird Street, Central

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About the Horizon 2055 Project

“Horizon 2055: philosophically exploring the present, creatively imagining the future”, is a 2025 research and engagement project initiated by the SARChI Chair in Identities and Social Cohesion in Africa (ISCIA). Understanding that social cohesion and sustainability go hand in hand, Horizon 2055 aimed to catalyze creative responses to shared pressing questions and concerns regarding the current and future sustainability of our city and beyond.

The Horizon 2055 Colloquium showcases reflective and academic works from participants contributing to the Horizon 2055 Online Seminar Series as well as responding to one of three, three-day, immersive city tours during the year.

Funding Acknowledgement

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Horizon 2055 Colloquium Programme

08:30	Arrival tea/coffee and welcome		
09:00	1	Alex Lenferna	Shitting where we eat, live and play – A tale of three beaches
09:25	2	Belinda DuPlooy	'Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert': Reconsidering ironic kinship in Neill Blomkamp's science fiction film CHAPPIE
09:50	3	Pfuneko Ngobeni	Currents and circuits: Environmental recovery and technological futures in post-industrial port cities.
10:15	4	Alex Pennington	On the Epistemology of Care
10:40	Tea Break (15 mins)		
10:55	5	Tessa McLeod Wattam	Rupture to Repair: An Eco-Somatic Investigation in Motherwell, Gqeberha In response to ISCIA's Horizons 2055 Immersion
11:20	6	Mojabeng Miya	"What if?"
11:45	7	SG	pHilosophy of Tide @www.Alchemyreflection.2055
12:10	8	Sibabalwe Kela	Balancing development, sustainability, and youth empowerment: A public administration perspective on the ISCIA Horizon 2055 city (e)scapes in Nelson Mandela Bay
12:35	Lunch (50 mins)		

13:25	9	Emma Hay	Liminal s(pace)
13:50	10	Siyanda Mhlom	Caring masculinities towards a sustainable future
14:15	11	Alida Sandison	The tension between the individual and group
14:40	12	Victoria Flowers	Living waters of Gqeberha: Intersections of utility, ritual and memory
15:05	Comfort Break (10 mins)		
15:15	13	Thembelihle Ngece	Social cohesion and the role of the Coega SEZ in building a sustainable 2055
15:40	14	Janet Cherry	Technology and freedom
16:05	15	Gary Koekemoer	"Doomsday imaginaries – can we movie our way out of this”?
16:30	16	Andrea Hurst	Sensing the city in crisis: Reflections from the Horizon 2055 research community
17:00	Cheese and wine		

Abstracts

(in alphabetical order)

Belinda Du Plooy

Senior Manager: Engagement, Engagement Office, Nelson Mandela University

'Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert': Reconsidering ironic kinship in Neill Blomkamp's science fiction film CHAPPIE

Neill Blomkamp's 2015 science fiction film CHAPPIE engages with the familiar narrative trope of robot sentience. Even though, to Blomkamp's frustration, the film was largely misunderstood and earned much criticism from the popular and also more critical viewing public upon release, it is a rich text to consider for the way Blomkamp uses the narrative techniques of pastiche, bricolage, assemblage, homage, genre hybridity and sub/intertextual play to construct this story of human existential angst about a future with artificial intelligence (AI). By scavenging from other texts, copying, adapting, and playing with metanarratives, Blomkamp assembles a collection of ideas and references that create a globally resonant hybrid tale of humanity's grand existential uncertainty and hope, set against the backdrop of hyper-realistic and dystopian contemporary South Africa. Blomkamp confronts viewers with a naïve and vulnerable childlike robot protagonist that is more human and likeable than any of the stilted and stereotypical real human characters in the film. It is the mechanical creature with which the viewer readily identifies and sympathises. Blomkamp facilitates, not only between his characters, but also with the audience, a kinship of the sort that Donna Haraway in *Staying with trouble* calls

affinity groups or assemblages of 'oddkin'. The immediately sympathetic response of the viewing audience to the mechanical robot is a key strategy in the way that Blomkamp applies irony in this film, which Haraway also identifies as central to her idea of the cyborg as an alternative and potentially liberatory myth. In this seminar, I engage in a close reading of the film, focusing on the broad network of speculative and science fiction narrative traditions within which this film operates. I consider possible reasons why the film was misread and met with criticism when it was first released. I also specifically investigate the strategies and techniques Blomkamp uses in his depiction of the robot character and how his use of its childlikeness and vulnerability and its engagement with violence and sacrifice are central to the film's ironic engagement with the central argument about the dangers of dehumanisation and the need to recuperate humaneness.

Janet Cherry

Professor (Development Studies) Nelson Mandela University

Technology and Freedom

The focus of this piece is the complex relationship between nature, technology and social organization. This relationship is situated in time, over the long duration, from the earliest human societies in the area, over 100 000 years ago, to the future society of the 21st century and beyond. It is also situated in space, in the geographic area of Nelson Mandela Bay, from the fishtraps of Cape Recife to the mountains of the Groendal wilderness. This talk explores how groups of humans have created

economies/societies/cultures in this context. It also explores concepts of freedom and sustainability in relation to systems of production.

Victoria Flowers

MA Visual Art, Nelson Mandela University

Living waters of Gqeberha: Intersections of utility, ritual and memory

This paper, prompted by the ISCIA Horizon 2055 research excursion encouraged the envisioning of alternatives to explore for a sustainable future in Gqeberha, South Africa. This paper aims to examine the interconnectedness of 3 specific water bodies, namely Brighton Beach, Papenkuils River and Swartkops River that function as ecological systems and cultural landscapes, flowing through and surrounding industrial and residential regions. These living waters serve as complex spaces where environmental crises intersect with social and spiritual practice. The research aims to critically engage with the combative methods implemented to reduce the environmental and structural degradation of these locations, specifically the pollution and contamination the water previously and is currently experiencing. It also seeks to acknowledge the ritual, recreational and memorial significance of the highlighted sites within the local communities. A mixed-method approach was employed, combining a desktop review of existing literature, environmental studies and qualitative data obtained through observation and field notes gathered from the informal conversations conducted during the excursion. Findings reveal significant pollution at all three sites, a recurring issue manifesting in industrial runoff and stormwater drain waste affecting Swartkops, improper waste treatment disposal

from Fishwater Flats impacting Papenkuils, and the ongoing E. Coli contamination along Brighton Beach. Despite the degradation, these sites remain important spaces for cleansing rituals, serve as community recreational areas which hold memory. This study argues for an inclusive, community informed environmental management approach and details the benefits of communal agency over these sites, proposing sustainable interventions rooted in both policy and community engagement.

Sendibitiyosi Gandidsanwa (SG)

PhD student (Chemistry), Nelson Mandela University

pHilosophy of Tide @www.Alchemyreflection.2055

What if chemistry could teach us about care? What if tides, waste, and wonder all followed the same reaction pathway? And what if transformation, of matter, meaning, and self, were the true experiment of being human? "pHilosophy of Tide @www.Alchemyreflection.2055" is a presentation emerging from the Horizon 2055 immersive tour. It fuses art, ecology, and philosophy through the language of chemistry and the stages of alchemy. Drawing from moments at the sewage works, Coega, Zwartkops Conservancy, and the collaborative performance, Paying Homage with artist Tessa. The work journeys from waste through wonder toward winning, a shift from what we discard to what we become. Through visuals and reflection, the presentation explores how teamwork, humility, and creative attention act as catalysts for renewal. Along the way, the presentation asks whether micro-reactions between body and landscape, dancer and camera, science and art, self and community can supply the activation energy required for collective transformation. If even discarded plastics or forgotten

estuaries can be transmuted, perhaps our habits and horizons can, too. The audience is invited to consider chemistry principles, like pH for equilibrium, as metaphors for social change. Can the smallest reactions between body and landscape, art and science, self and community generate the energy needed for collective transformation, for a better tomorrow?

Emma Hay

Postdoctoral Fellow for the SARChI Chair (ISCIA), Nelson Mandela University

Liminal s(pace)

Working from an ecofeminist lens, this presentation draws attention to the critical importance of pace for the reimagining of an ecological future. Liminal space – the transitory, the in-between, the edge – provides essential ground for creative imagination, existing in the fold between intended purpose and a new state of be(com)ing. This halting, slowing and gathering (s)pace of liminality is subsumed by the hyperactivity of the attention economy. Our digitalised world is one of ever-increasing pace, of information overload, rapidly changing technologies, and the squeezing of productivity from every moment, where acceptance of ‘bigger, more, and faster’ is considered better. In reply, I offer a musically inspired slowing down, a dip into liminality. Moving from the micro, somatic world of the human nervous system and stretching to the macro world of global systemic organisation, I attempt to demonstrate how the deliberate and intentional slowing of pace is both recollective and therapeutic. Here, the handpan, serving as an interlude and accented by properties of super-sonance, offers an instrumentally enacted ‘ecology of repair’, both literally and figuratively. For

pace, when consciously engaged and intentionally slowed, has a remarkable ability to create breathing room – inviting recollective moments and providing room for thoughtful reflection. In this spirit, I will walk us through liminal soundscapes, blurring the discord between third-person dispassion and creative expression and in doing so, to reveal the beauty within the ugly and the ugly lurking within the beauty.

Andrea Hurst

Professor of Philosophy, SARCHI Chair (ISCIA), Nelson Mandela University

Sensing the city in crisis: Reflections from the Horizon 2055 research community

The Horizon 2055 project was conceived as a catalyst for creative and philosophical engagement with pressing concerns about urban sustainability in the context of the human-made polycrisis. It asks: Can we remedy the crisis? Is it too late? Should we try? By cultivating both philosophical reflection and experiential, aesthetic wisdom, the project sought to deepen our awareness of the present condition of our city and stimulate imaginative projections – whether of the futures we seem destined for or of alternative possibilities. Central to this project was the formation of an egalitarian research community of participant-researchers, as a diverse collective of educators and emerging educators. The project integrates critical scholarship with practical engagement through three interconnected activities: a series of weekly online seminars, three immersive city tours, and a multimedia exhibition showcasing artistic and academic responses to these so-called “city (e)scapes.” In this talk, I offer a distillation of

some of the collective wisdom that emerged from the three city (e)scapes. Drawing on transcribed voice-notes from participants, I distil some themes that surfaced across all three immersive journeys, revealing some of the complex entanglements we face regarding urban sustainability.

Sibabalwe Kela

MA Public Administration, Nelson Mandela University

Balancing development, sustainability, and youth empowerment: A public administration perspective on the ISCIA Horizon 2055 city (e)scapes in Nelson Mandela Bay

“Sustainable Development” is a crucial concept globally, since it encompasses a framework of universal objectives to address social, economic, and environmental challenges. Protecting individuals and the natural environment exemplifies the idea of the person-in-environment. The ecosocial approach is frequently discussed in the context of transforming society for ecological benefit. In this context, youth, often defined as individuals between 15 and 34, represent a substantial demographic group. Their empowerment as societal members is essential for the shift from a human-centered to an ecosocial paradigm, aimed at achieving Sustainable Development (SD) and the United Nations' “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” encompassing its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this auto-ethnographic study I consider my experiences and observations from the Horizon 2055 City (E)Scapes Journey to help analyse the intersections of sustainable development, community empowerment, industrial transformation, and environmental stewardship in Nelson Mandela Bay.

This research critically examines how personal experiences at sites including Brighton Beach, Fishwater Flats, the Coega Biomass Centre, the Volkswagen manufacturing plant, the KwaNobuhle Love Life Youth Centre, Van Stadens Flower Reserve, and SANCOB can enrich the comprehension of sustainability from a public administration perspective. This study utilises auto-ethnography as both a methodology and an analytical tool, highlighting how personal reflections illuminate broader social concerns related to climate change, waste management, youth empowerment, biodiversity protection, and economic technology developments. The findings demonstrate that integrating personal experiences into academic research humanises the inquiry and underscores the importance of experiential learning in shaping policies for sustainable and equitable development.

Gary Koekemoer

Postdoctoral Fellow for the SARChI Chair (ISCIA), Nelson Mandela University

"Doomsday imaginaries – can we movie our way out of this”?

Climate change impacts are an existential threat to human wellbeing. Yet despite very clear long-term trends, and extensive scientific consensus highlighting the threat, humanity appears to be stepping into danger not away from it. Our fossil fuel usage is increasing exponentially, we consume unrelentingly. Is our inattention simply an outcome of corporate greed and exploitation? Or could it be because of a flaw in our thinking, that how we imagine the future limits how we act? Using American-made English-medium “doomsday” movies as a proxy of dominant Western thinking, I ask how do they imagine our future, both that of humanity and the Earth? Chosen for their range of

options and popularity, I focus on five movies: Day after Tomorrow (2004); The Day the Earth stood still (2008); Wall-E (2008); Interstellar (2013), and Geostorm (2017). This leads me to asking what “myths” act as foundational to our thinking, and whether modern movies are an extension of the original Biblical Genesis account and/or Plato’s views of humanity’s relation to its only “home”. My provisional conclusion is that we cannot imagine a future without humans in it, we always survive; that there is always hope, always a solution, either self-created or from an external entity; and that the planet is not essential to our future, we do not consider ourselves bound to it, it is our vessel to use. And therein to me the flaw in our imaginaries, we see ourselves removed from the complexity we are enmeshed within, and therefore our way through.

Alex Lenferna

Research Fellow – Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research, UFH

Shitting where we eat, live and play – a tale of three beaches

This talk will explore the past, present, and future of three beaches in the Nelson Mandela Bay area, namely, Brighton Beach, King’s Beach, and Cape Recife. It will explore how throughout their history, the beaches have been shaped by forces both natural and human and how geological forces connect the three beaches. Through an environmental justice lens, it will explore the inequities in how pollution, access, and enjoyment of the beaches has occurred in the past and continues to play out. One prominent element that the talk will discuss is the impacts of sewage on the beaches, and how the effects spill over, literally and metaphorically, to impacting the broader bay area. The piece will

end by contemplating what future possibilities for the beaches might look like in 30 years' time, in 2055. How will the impacts of climate change, population dynamics, consumption patterns and more potentially affect the future of the beaches and all the lives that they impact?

Tessa McLeod Wattam

BA Visual art, Nelson Mandela University, Post Grad Dip, Institute for Heritage Science and Conservation.

Rupture to Repair: An Eco-Somatic Investigation in Motherwell, Gqeberha In response to ISCIA's Horizons 2055 Immersion

Human experience is inherently relational and interdependent, a dynamic mirrored throughout the natural world. Our sense of identity and belonging is shaped through relationships with both community and environment. Yet, establishing conditions for healthy relationality—what attachment theory terms secure attachment—remains deeply challenged by intergenerational trauma and the enduring effects of systemic oppression (Rozek, 2024). This project asks how discourses of ecological restoration and sustainable development intersect with existing communities where socio-ecological relations and economic realities are inseparably linked. Framed through an ecological-materialist lens and realised via interdisciplinary creative processes, it investigates the role of intentional community-building and ritual in fostering social cohesion and ecological repair. The research is situated at the Motherwell Community and Enviro Hub in Gqeberha—a grassroots initiative that integrates recycling, food gardens, and educational programmes. The study examines how environmental degradation,

including flooding, poor sanitation, and inadequate housing, fragments the relationship between body and land. Through a synthesis of eco-somatic practice (mindful, body-based inquiry) and ecobuilding methods (reimagining waste as resource), the project seeks locally grounded responses that restore relational and ecological balance while addressing material community needs. The intended outcome is the creation of functional art that serves as a visual and experiential language of reverence for place. This work aims to evoke collective agency, strengthen social cohesion, and draw attention to persistent socio-ecological issues while imagining new forms of community-led repair.

Siyanda Mhlom

Mphil student (Gender Studies), UNISA and gender equality activist

Caring masculinities towards a sustainable future

The climate crisis is not only a product of industrial overproduction and technological expansion but also of the cultural beliefs and social values that shape human relations with the environment. Drawing from personal experiences in the rural village of Queenstown, this paper explores how constructions of manhood and womanhood are intertwined with ecological practices. In such contexts, masculinity is expressed through acts of building, herding, and providing, while femininity manifests in nurturing families and cultivating gardens. These gendered practices reflect a relational understanding of ecology grounded in care and sustainability. However, in post-colonial urban settings such as Gqeberha, hegemonic masculinity—as described by R.W. Connell (1995)—promotes domination, competition, and control, aligning with exploitative attitudes toward nature. Following

Jonas Anshelm (2017), this study situates industrial capitalism within the defense of male identity and critiques the association of eco-friendly behavior with femininity. The paper engages Martin Hultman and Paul Pulé's (2018) theory of ecological masculinities to envision alternative, caring expressions of manhood. By examining the overlooked environmental contributions of waste reclaimers in South Africa (Samson, 2020), it argues that reimagining masculinities as nurturing and community-oriented offers a transformative pathway toward ecological justice and a greener future.

Mojabeng Miya

BSc student (Biochem, Chem, Micro, Physiology), Nelson Mandela University

“What if?”

On the 23rd of April 2025, while sitting in my zoology class, I received a memo about a city escape journey in Gqeberha. Something inside me said I should go. I emailed Mrs Harsheila Riga, attended the briefing at Bird Street campus, and soon found myself preparing for a journey that would change how I see the world. From the beginning, one question kept repeating in my mind — “What if?” Our first stop was a closed beach, polluted by sewage. I had never thought about where our waste goes or who deals with it. At the sewage works, I saw how neglect and ignorance destroy what sustains us. I asked myself, what if we cared more? Later, at Motherwell and Red House, I saw the contrast between privilege and poverty, peace and noise, and wondered how different life could be if people valued their surroundings equally. As the journey progressed, my hope grew stronger. At VW, I learned about free training that gives skills to those left out of universities, and at LoveLife, I saw a center that gives

hope to the broken and forgotten. At the Van Stadens Flower Reserve, I also got a positive “what if.” The young women there worked out of love for nature. Finally, the wind farm visit showed me that our country is capable of change and renewal. This journey taught me gratitude, awareness, and purpose. I realized that I can’t remain ignorant — because what if the future truly depends on me, on us, to care for the world we live in?

Thembelihle Ngece

Postgraduate student (Development Finance), Nelson Mandela University

Social cohesion and the role of the Coega SEZ in building a sustainable 2055

This academic article examines the contribution of the Coega Special Economic Zone (SEZ) to social cohesion and sustainable development in South Africa’s Eastern Cape province. Grounded in the broader vision of a sustainable and inclusive 2055, the study explores how Coega’s industrial growth model extends beyond economic outputs to address social inequality, unemployment, and environmental stewardship. The research aims to understand how the Coega Development Corporation (CDC) facilitates community upliftment through job creation, skills development, and partnerships with private and public entities. Influenced by critical research questions such as, how SEZs foster social cohesion, what sustainable practices Coega integrates into its operations, and how these efforts align with national development frameworks such as the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030- this study uses Coega as a critical case study in geographically targeted development. The study uses a desktop analysis with data drawing from secondary literature, government policy

documents, and corporate social investment (CSI) case studies such as Volkswagen's community initiatives. The article argues that Coega's model of inclusive industrialization demonstrates how special economic zones can foster societal transformation. Finally, this study concludes that SEZs, when governed with a people focused and conservation-minded approach, can play an instrumental role in reducing inequality, strengthening shared identity, and creating sustainable urban tomorrow. Additionally, the study highlights Coega as a representation for how South Africa can shift towards a cohesive, sustainable economy by 2055.

Pfuneko Ngobeni

BA student (Psychology), Nelson Mandela University

Currents and circuits: Environmental recovery and technological futures in post-industrial port cities

This illustrated research article explores the intersection between ecological recovery and technological innovation as experienced during the Horizon 2055 City (E)Scapes tour. The project draws from field observations across Gqeberha's changing landscapes — from polluted sites like the Motherwell Canal and Brighton Beach outfall to the restored ecosystems of Van Stadens and the Cape Recife penguin rehabilitation centre. These spaces reveal both the fragility and resilience of local ecologies. In contrast, the visit to the Volkswagen factory provided an immersive glimpse into the future of automated industry — where robotic systems and artificial intelligence redefine production and human labour. Together, these experiences inspired the concept “currents and circuits”, which

frames the environment and technology as interdependent systems shaping the city's future. This output proposes that sustainable urban futures depend on finding balance between ecological restoration ("currents") and technological progress ("circuits"). By reflecting on these intertwined systems through academic and visual means, the work invites audiences to imagine a 2055 city where environmental renewal and industrial innovation coexist in harmony.

Alex Pennington

MPhil (Justice & Transformation), UCT; MSc (Health & Development), UCL, Life Counsellor

On the Epistemology of Care

In this essay, I offer a reflection on the problem Alisdair MacIntyre identifies as a quintessential feature of modern research universities and how the pedagogy of *The Journey* is a fruitful response. In *The Very Idea of a University*, MacIntyre writes that the modern research university tends to create narrow specialists, and narrow specialisms can deform or harm the mind. I offer an example using debates from my own profession – one of the branches of mental healthcare – noting how observation is not pure perception but often theory-laden. If that is the case, how is it possible to open the mind again? With the pedagogy of *The Journey* in mind, I offer a personal reflection of how I was edified by the experience, an experience which could be cultivated by universities. The essay ends on an affirmation on the role of care in everyday life, especially considering what kind of politics arise once the virtue of "care" is rejected.

Alida Sandison

PhD Psychology, Senior Lecturer in Psychology, Nelson Mandela University

The tension between the individual and group

Urban sustainability is generally viewed through the lens of systems, infrastructure, and collective impact, which thirteen of us examined on a three-day experiential journey. We were exposed to diverse environments and sustainability challenges throughout the Nelson Mandela Metropole. Each participant navigated their own emotional terrain, with reactions involving curiosity, exasperation, hope, and helplessness. While we all walked away with a heightened awareness of our shared ecological footprint, the experience also highlighted our individual limitations in the face of systemic issues. This reflection explores how personal agency intersects with collective responsibility. The scale of urban environmental degradation appears overwhelming but reveals that sustainability is not just a technical or political challenge—but is deeply personal one. The personal challenge is rooted in the management of our various personal reactions and responses, as we recognize the boundaries of our influence, and therein find frustration, humility, and freedom.