

# GENE & FRED

*My happiness is a symptom of my property*

Jack Roberts with Alison Yip

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In Bloemfontein, the shining wealth of nearby diamond extraction and the uneven distribution of automobiles and residences has produced a suburban landscape folded into a domain of idealised violence.

Bloemfontein benefited greatly from the influx of wealth; it is, metaphorically and literally, a city built on a bed of diamonds. The suburban residential areas of Bloemfontein are marked by houses with high exterior walls around their front lawns with a stretch of grass between the wall and the street. A series of green, highly pruned shrubs dot a line along the green. Each component of this arrangement is a security apparatus designed to defend the home from the perceived threat of intrusion, protecting the interiority of extracted wealth. Together, these three components form a semiotic chain, a sentence built of seemingly innocuous urban planning components: wall, shrub, lawn. This arrangement is more about its message than its effectiveness as a defence.

Bloemfontein appears as an absence in the poetic architecture of the work, its only referent is its signifier. It haunts us as without dimension or temporality. In this way, it's similar to the rarified diamonds whose inflated prices formed the foundation of Bloemfontein as a city, or the aesthetic idealism of the Bloemfonteinian suburban design language. In the last analysis, these works materialise as a nuanced critique of the idealism of Bloemfontein, and of (sub)urban sites themselves.

- Matthew Lawson Garrett, October 2026