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Afrofuturist to bantutopian cities: towards an aesthetics of sustainable African cities

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ABSTRACT

In my thesis I explore the aesthetics of sustainable African cities through the lens of Afrofuturism as an inclusive design approach. It explores this through studio-based research in site specific contexts of Joburg, Dunusa (which means to bend over in Zulu) to cocreate an embodied culture of sustainability using solar power as central technology of interest. Through various interventions such as guerilla gardening and performing as an informal solar 'trader' as an active participant of the city, I question sustainable city paradigms of 'green' and 'smart' cities that are exclusive to black inhabitants in the inner city of Joburg and spatially explore how they can be inclusive amongst the practices of urban African communities through interventions that suggest a new urban language. Though this critical spatial practice, these interventions manifest a relational aesthetics of sustainability namely Bantutopianism. Through Bantutopianism we challenge Afrofuturism's inability to adequately deal with the praxis of utopianisms engaged with true lived black vernacular realities in urban space to decipher the relation between humans and non-humans alike. This is in the context of informal trading spaces in African cities such as Dunusa. It explores an ethics of relationality which seeks to embed an embodied consciousness to sustainability that advances a post anthropocentric view underpinned by the philosophy of Ubuntu. This leads to the production of art for renewable energy infrastructure wired towards climate change mitigation and adaptation with the endeavor to generate earthly-cosmological ontologies that guard our planetary futures. Where energy poverty persists, the right to the city becomes the right to the sun. This research through a visual essay and literary aesthetics illustrates the necessary artefacts and rituals of the future such as those provided by the solar futurhythmachine as a resourceful sustainable architectural tool for devising alternative energy utopias inspired and centered around black cultural life to understand an aesthetics of sustainable African cities.