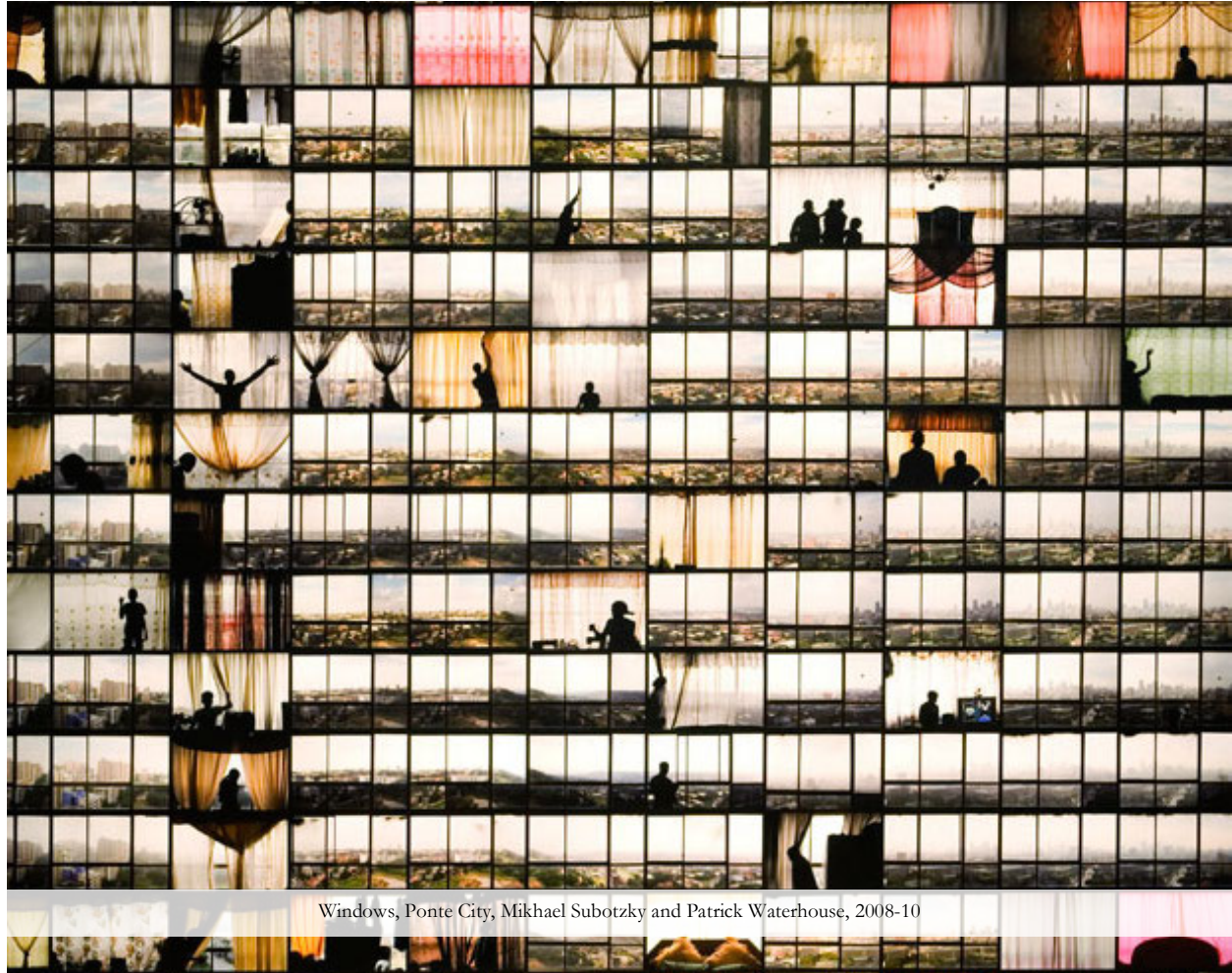


URBAN FUTURES/FUTURE ARCHITECTURES AFRICA 6.0  
**Imaging/Imagining the Afro-future City**



Windows, Ponte City, Mikhael Subotzky and Patrick Waterhouse, 2008-10

Can a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have been subsequently consumed by the search for legible traces of its history imagine possible futures?

Mark Dery, "Black to the Future"

Architecture by its very nature is speculative. The process of making architecture conceptualizes ideas, typically in the form of delineations (drawings + models,) that indicate what is possible, what is imaginable for a particular place and time. Modernism's visions of the future, for instance, tethered this imaginary potential to the engines of modernity—technology, democracy, and capitalism. Skeptical of the modernist project's redemptive capacity, Manfredo Tafuri observed of 60s "urban imageability" and "prospective aesthetic" that the creation of multivalent images of the city was an attempt to resolve (albeit a failure) the economic and ideological contradictions of the contemporary city. From the 60s onward McLuhan, Jameson, and others critiqued the explosion of images facilitated by the expansion of capitalism at a global scale and the rise of imaging technologies. But with imaging and retrieval technology in everyone's pocket, the production of images has increased exponentially in scale and scope. This increase is further fueled by ever expanding global networks of shared images and video streams. The responsive surface has now become the smart façade, Paul Virilio's overexposed interface has finally made it to zero. Our studio will delve into this contemporary condition to inquire: what is the role of architecture in imaging the city? How might architecture construct a radical imaginary of the city—an Afro-future city? And how can we use this radical imaginary to position architectural critique of existing conditions?



There is a way in which the city itself is very close to animation. Johannesburg is like an animation of a city. That's the first thing to be said about a city that erases itself. William Kentridge, *That which is not Drawn*

Known as Egoli, Joburg, Jozi and a host of other names, the South African city of Johannesburg has been imagined to be many things in its short 100-year history. Built on a river of gold, the natural resources that created its great wealth remained out sight and far below ground. The teeming metropolis above ground became both a plateau of constant erasures and forgetting as well as a terrain of exuberant invention and imagination. The brutal dictates of apartheid law implemented in the spatial planning of the twentieth century city and reinforced by a fortress-style architecture imagined a city that was inhabitable only by white citizens who were buffered by zones of colored residents in order to keep black residents peripheral – spatially, politically and economically, except when their labor was needed to tender the urban machine. Today's post-apartheid Johannesburg imagines itself as the poster child for the neo-liberal multicultural city whose explosive frictions are arbitrated in the jubilant displays of local pride at global sporting events like the World Cup (2010). Recently, Johannesburg's city government imagined and imaged its distinctive skyline as a "World Class African City," however not everyone was persuaded to believe in the brand. A lawsuit from a disgruntled resident charged false advertising given the city's persistent rolling black outs and hi-jacked high-rises. Taking a cue from Afro-futurism, a sci-fi movement that merges of the aesthetic sensibilities of the African diaspora with the emancipatory potential of new technologies, the studio project will follow cyberpunk theorist Mark Dery's charge to "imagine possible futures." The studio project will speculate upon what Johannesburg imagines itself to be in 2115. The 100-year time scale of the projects will enable a speculative images that appropriate the tropes and poetic license of fiction to reimage Johannesburg and its possible futures.



Johannesburg is a metropolis in the sense used by Max Weber, Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and others, that is, a capitalist formation closely tied to the money economy and individuality, to calculability and fortuitousness. Metropolitan existence here is "displayed" not necessarily through exhibitions or parks, but via an enticing array of consumer labels and products, highways and luminous flows, store windows and huge advertising billboards, new architecture and, more generally, technophilia.

Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nutall, "Writing the World from an African Metropolis"

IMAGING/IMAGINING THE AFRO-FUTURE CITY will pick up the research threads and methods developed by Global Africa Lab (GAL) over the past three years. The first half of the semester the studio will research the spatial, temporal and socio-political dynamics of image creation and circulation. Imaging will be studied at multiple time scales—*past/present/future*. Student teams will study the technologies that produce and the infrastructures that circulate images. The first four-weeks of the studio hosts a workshop whose series of tutorials introduce techniques of data mining, visualization, and spatialization through parametric modeling. With specially developed software for the studio, students will sift through social media feeds of Instagram, Vine, Flickr, Facebook, MXiT, and other relevant resources of image production and circulation. These topological models developed in Rhino with Grasshopper\* will allow these systems and phenomena to be studied in temporal magnitudes. These animated parametric models and conventional mappings and diagrams will capture the temporal and spatial dimensions of the inequalities embedded within these systems and networks. This research will be further honed through a weeklong visit to Johannesburg in the fifth week of the semester to engage in further research on project sites. We will hold project reviews and workshops with architects, artists and curators at Studio X. With the rich body of research and the parametric and analogue models as a foundation, the studio will develop for the rest of the semester architectural propositions in the form of videos on six sites that radically imagine Johannesburg in 2115. Students will develop theses on the utopian or dystopian possibilities of the city's architectural and urban futures.

*\*Note: prior knowledge of these tools is not required; but interest in learning how to use them is mandatory!*