INTRODUCTION: IMAGINING AFRICA'S FUTURE CITIES

Stephanie Bosch Santana
Harvard University

Stephanie Bosch Santana introduces a selection of essays produced for Achille Mbembe's "African Future Cities" seminar held at Harvard University in the second half of 2013. She frames the pieces gathered here in light of a growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship figuring African urbanism as a site of creativity and crisis; exploring tropes of migration, alterity, spectacle and uncertainty as they play out across the imagined terrains of African futurities.

The images of Africa's "future cities" are resplendent. Hope City, to be built on the outskirts of Accra, Ghana, appears as a cluster of tapered cylinders like otherworldly cocoons rising out of a red, barren landscape. Designed by an Italian architect in the (supposed) style of Northern Ghanaian roundhouses, the towers are drawn in such a way that they seem to be in motion, each spinning rapidly on its own axis, as though propelling itself into the future.

The images of Eko Atlantic, currently under construction on land reclaimed from the sea on the edge of Lagos, Nigeria, are equally fantastic. Described by its developers as "an ocean-front city that will be one of the wonders of the 21st century," the mixed-use enclave will include a Business District with "a spectacular central boulevard…similar in size to the Champs-Elysees in Paris or Fifth Avenue in New York;" an oceanfront promenade with a water park, cinema, and shops; and a central marina—its circular harbor a dazzling aqua blue out of which curves a building shaped like a glassy, swelling wave (ekoatlantic.com).

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The African continent's rapid urbanization has created a variety of new city forms such as these. Whether real or imagined, already built or existing only as architectural plans and sleek images on billboards and websites, these future cities embody a number of contradictions. Often designed to be "sustainable" and "eco-friendly," they are fuelled at least in part by the extraction of finite resources (oil, minerals, and natural gas) and thus have complex relationships to the natural environment. Africa's future cities are also frequently planned on the peripheries of existing metropolises and threaten to inscribe new forms of urban apartheid even as they inspire visions of a more equal and prosperous future. While often funded by foreign investors and designed in architectural firms in faraway New York or Abu Dhabi, these cities have a way of working themselves into local popular imaginaries such that farmers who will be displaced by Kinshasa's plans for the ultra-modern Cité du Fleuve are able to muse, "Yes, we'll be the victims, but still it will be beautiful" (De Boeck 85).

Indeed, many of the images of Africa's projected urban futures are beautiful, captivating. So much so that a recent slew of articles has been dedicated to discerning whether these master plans will become realities or remain fantasies. Whether or not one of Hope City's towers will eventually stand as the tallest in Africa (for the moment the project has yet to break ground), it and

'Sign of Trouble'. Flickr: Katha Schulz, Treegrow. Jan. 2, 2011 Empty cocoon of the infamous palmkiller, Rhynchophorus ferrugineus, in situ, hanging in a canary date palm (Phoenix canariensis) fruit stalk. When you see these around your palm tree, it's usually already doomed. Els Poblets, Comunidad Valenciana, Spain. 30 December 2010.

cities like it are indicative of the increased blurring of boundaries between the fantastic and the real, the actual and the virtual. Achille Mbembe (2013) suggests that in our age of image-capitalism, where the image has become a "techno-phenomenological institution," our ideas of (and desires for) the future are increasingly shaped by images and mediated by screens. Today's rapidly diversifying digital technologies accelerate the circulation of these images. In addition to multimedia websites, many of these future cities also have their own Facebook pages where they share photos, accept friend requests, and post status updates. Kenya's Tatu City writes encouraging messages wishing its followers a wonderful weekend, a Happy Easter, and even congratulating Uhuru Kenyatta on his election as president. Eko Atlantic posts more informative project updates, for example the pictures of a recent visit to

the development site by schoolchildren who say they hope to one day live there. Most bizarrely, Hope City—or perhaps someone posing as it—posts cryptic riddles and jokes on its page. For cities that do not yet exist, they certainly have active social lives.

In addition to what these cities' virtual presences suggest as to the subjecthood of things and what Mbembe hails as a new form of animism under late capitalism, they also raise questions as to their impact on our own imaginative faculties. Do these cities enhance our capacity to dream or do they arrest our imaginations? In her provocative essay in this volume, Jessica Dickson discusses the capacity of science fiction to "punctuate" reality with fantasy, creating "gaps" that allow us to "think with vocabularies that do not exist." Similarly, by trading in the fantastic, do the images of these cities create space for us to think in new urban forms? Or do they capture our fantasies, making it difficult to think outside of the corporate futures that they signal? In other words, do they circumscribe our vocabularies with neo-liberal ideologies or do they inspire us to articulate the future in new ways?

If the essays collected here are any indication, these images of the future urban—if at turns arresting, inspiring, and controversial—are ultimately productive. Achille Mbembe's "African Future Cities" course, which he taught at Harvard University in Fall 2013 (and that generated the majority of the essays collected here), opened with these images, sparking a number of essential questions about the future and future-thinking: In what ways does the African future city transform our understanding of the future of urban forms on a global scale? Are future cities spaces of connection or exclusion, thresholds or boundaries? What does the African future city look like as imagined through literary and artistic forms, and how do these visions converge or diverge from those of architects, urban planners, government taskforces, and multinational corporations? While broadly concerned with images and manifestations of futurity, the papers in this collection take the African future city as a useful theoretical lens through which to consider entangled temporalities, spatialities, and visibilities. How are ideas of the past, present, and future made visible in these city forms? What do urban forms and their representations reveal about the relationship between the real and the virtual, the psychic and the material? How can we move beyond the repetition of existing forms to imagine new ones? Together, these essays provide a variety of new insights into the imaginative practices and resources through which Africa's future cities are being made and remade.

As the essays in this volume show, future-thinking in Africa is far from limited to billion dollar commercial projects like Hope City and Eko Atlantic. In addition to driving economic growth, the continent's burgeoning cities are also its creative epicenters, where local resources are mobilized daily to respond to complex and evolving urban realities. Taking us into one of Accra's most infamous slums "Sodom and Gomorrah," Debbie Onuoha reveals what some of the survival strategies of informal urbanism look like: residents set up ad hoc markets, build makeshift homes on the banks of the polluted Korle Lagoon, and mine e-waste dumps for copper and other useful metals. These informal urban strategies are often in conflict with government sanctioned visions of the future, leading to official "solutions" that are sometimes as impractical as they are violent—as in the case of municipal "decongestion" policies in Accra. Onuoha argues that these policies betray authorities' fears of losing control over the movement of people and goods and that the positioning of the informal as "congestant" shows its underlying associations with the transgressive, the unclean, and the foreign. Rather than purge the city of informality—a virtual impossibility—Onuoha argues for the importance of integrating informal practices, residences, and economies into cities' future urban plans.

Mark Duerksen's essay on Rem Koolhaas's still-unpublished study of Lagos also addresses the relationship between urban planning and informal infrastructures. Koolhaas's fame brought international attention to his approach to Lagos as a site of innovation rather than tragedy or chaos, as a place from which the rest of the world could learn, and is indicative, as Duerksen argues, of a larger paradigm shift in African studies. Duerksen notes that Koolhaas and his team had a particularly keen eye when it came to observing and documenting Lagosians' innovative repurposings of the city's space and materials. Koolhaas's insistence that Lagos was a city that "worked"—indeed, a city that represented the "terminal state" of metropolises in the global north—generated heated debate amongst urban planners, policy developers, and historians, many of whom accused Koolhaas of romanticizing informality and ignoring the political, economic, and historical factors that had contributed to Lagos's current state. In fact, rather than eschew planning, Duerksen emphasizes that Koolhaas came away from the project with a renewed sense of its importance: formal plans, which are never executed quite as intended, provide an essential starting point for informal interventions. While acknowledging some of the shortcomings of Koolhaas's study, Duerksen suggests that it should be supplemented with ones that are similarly embedded in local

cultures and urbanisms and committed to articulating them on their own terms—outside of Western vocabularies and imageries.

In his essay "Where There Are No Others," Eric Reinhart gives further credence to the idea that it is to the global south that we must look in order to better perceive the shape of the world's urban futures. Through a consideration of Chicago's "Lakeside"—a massive development planned for Chicago's notoriously poor and black South Side—Reinhart shows how "dual" or "corporate" cities such as this have their antecedents in predatory, neoliberal development and structural adjustment policies that have plagued much of the global south for decades. More than new forms of urban planning, Reinhart argues that these developments signal new modes of "entrepreneurial" governance. Mega-developments like Lakeside and Eko Atlantic "represent the most advanced form of neoliberal urban governance and the most spectacular culmination of the public-private partnership to date" and will have dire consequences for their victims: namely, the poor and working classes who will be increasingly displaced and disenfranchised from what essentially constitutes a new form of corporate citizenship. Like Eko Atlantic or La Cité du Fleuve, Lakeside will have its own public services, schools, and police force; it will circumvent rather than seek to address the challenges facing the existing South Side community. Overall, these new cities seek not only to marginalize the working classes and the poor but to erase them altogether from visions of the future. Reinhart cautions, "We are planning cities in which there are no outsiders, no signs of the unincorporated. We are creating insulated urbanities where there are no poor, no marginalized, no pasts. We are planning for worlds where there are no others."

While there are many reasons to fear the birth of what Reinhart heralds as the "corporate charter city"—a city with no past—a number of essays in this volume also give hope as to the power of imaginative and aesthetic practices to reclaim and transform urban spaces, often by activating multiple temporalities simultaneously. Whereas urban plans are future-oriented out of necessity, literary and artistic representations have greater freedom to seek the future in the past and in alternative presents. In her essay on Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda, Dariel Cobb showcases the artist's interventions into the urban space of contemporary Luanda through playful representations and appropriations of public monuments. Statues occupy an important place in the metropolitan landscape as forms where urban planning, public art, and state ideology meet to contest visions of the city's past, present, and future. Cobb argues that by placing fashion designer Shunnoz Fiel dos Santos atop a pedestal once occupied by the likeness of Portuguese colonist Paolo Dias de Novais, Henda engages in a practice of temporal mixing through which he uses the past to "catalyze and ignite possible futures." Cobb sees Henda's historically conscious, site-specific work as standing in contrast to the many *tabula rasa* developments that are currently being developed across the continent, suggesting that the Angolan government's commissioning of such projects from foreign architectural firms displays an overall poverty of imagination. Artists like Henda are breaking out of the molds prescribed by these international firms and reclaiming the right to envisage alternative, more creative futures.

In her essay on Lauren Beukes's award-winning novel *Zoo City* (2010), Jessica Dickson suggests that the novel is significant not only as a work of speculative fiction but also for the insights it provides into new

African urbanisms. The capacity of science fiction to create "gaps" through cognitive estrangement in turn opens up space for "new ways of thinking, writing, and theorizing the city." Notably, Beukes, like Henda, takes the existing city space as her canvas, using recognizable neighborhoods, buildings, and locations throughout Johannesburg as the basis for her imagination of an alternative present. This present is marked most fundamentally by a new social and ontological category, Aposymbiosis or "Zoo," wherein a person's criminal past is manifested as an animal partner. Dickson shows us how Beukes's research-based approach to writing marginalized subjects reveals the city's networks of informality through her use of "characters as infrastructure." The novel's minor and major characters, which include migrants, hustlers, record-producers, and internet scammers, re-write the city as they move between its various spaces—from Hillbrow, where many Zoos reside, to the stylized, socially-exclusive city-suburbs of Rosebank and Newtown, and also to the city's more or less invisible spaces—the underground drainage systems and the mine dumps on the city's outskirts that recall Johannesburg's history as a site of racialized, migrant labor. While these informal infrastructures are often improvised and driven by necessity, they are based on a web of entangled interpersonal relationships and inflected by race, ethnicity, gender, and nationality as well as Zoo status. Furthermore, while Hillbrow is depicted as a space of criminality, its informal networks ultimately forge community and connection, unlike the city's gated suburbs, which create havens for the wealthy, and ultimately fester and rot from the inside. Reading *Zoo City*, one suspects that satellite cities like Lakeside and Eko Atlantic may suffer similar fates. However, unlike the futuristic images of these cities, which suggest an estranged reality

that may exclude us, Dickson argues that Beukes's use of science fiction and fantasy to evoke an alternative Johannesburg encourages us as readers to participate in the "cognitive work" of imagining the city's past, present, and possible futures.

Other resources that are mobilized to envision alternative futures include the spiritual. As Greg Marinovich suggests in his photo essay on Kimbanguism, a Christian sectarian movement founded by Simon Kimbangu in the Belgian Congo in the early 1900s, city-dwellers often turn to religion in order to fulfill needs left unaddressed by the state. These needs are material—including health and educational facilities—as well as immaterial: Kimbanguism provides its followers with networks and imaginative resources that allow them to survive in a chaotic and challenging urban landscape. Marinovich's photographs also give insight into the importance of both ritual and memorialization in relation to built forms and the physical environment, from parades that imitate government ceremony at the mother church's 37,000-capacity temple to the humble prison wall that serves as a material reminder of Kimbangu's imprisonment and sacrifice.

Many of the essays collected here address the methods, disciplines, and perspectives through which we study the city. Duerksen notes the various ways that Koolhaas and his team explored Lagos—first from the removed safety of a car, then on foot, and finally, in the President's borrowed helicopter (the method that has drawn the most vocal critiques). Each of these vantage points provided new and different insights into the city and how it functioned. Against those who objected to Koolhaas's method as reductionist and essentializing, Duerksen reminds us that Koolhaas approached the city first and foremost as an architect, with an interest in built form, and not as a political

scientist or anthropologist. If the bird's eye or helicopter view that Koolhaas finally adopted represents one means of apprehending urban environments, many of the other essays in this volume engage with the more fragmented, partial, and embedded perspective of the walking subject. For example, while Reinhart is concerned with the historical, economic, and political factors leading to the growth of the global corporate city, he also takes us imaginatively into the space of Chicago's South Side, walking us through its abandoned buildings to the barren field where Lakeside is to be developed. Standing on the water's edge, we see its past—the steel mills that once stood there—and also envision its future. Similarly, through the inclusion of substantial portions of text from *Zoo City*, particularly those that take us into Johannesburg's different urban spaces from the perspective of the novel's protagonist, Zinzi, Dickson also highlights the value of seeing the city from the ground level, through eyes that feel like our own but that we share with someone else—which is of course one of the most powerful aspects of literary fiction. While these essays gesture to the importance of an embodied perspective, Darja Djordjevic and J. Antonio Campos engage most explicitly with the experiential dimension of urban forms and the relationship between materiality and subjectivity in their contributions. While Djordjevic considers how Rwanda's development agenda crystallizes into urban forms and products that shape lived experience in Kigali, Campos meditates on the role that affect plays in the making of the city.

In contrast to the satellite cities discussed above, Rwanda's capital Kigali is one of the few places where a major overhaul is planned for the city's existing space (Watson 2013). As Djordjevic describes in her essay "Accelerated Kigali," Rwanda's current development

policies are striving to overcome the nation's traumatic past and to "make up for lost time" by speeding it into the future, a process that "is about rewriting the temporal requirements that we typically associate with the teleology of modernity." In its efforts to become an ICT hub and middle-income country by 2020, Rwanda is leaping over some of the developmental stages typically associated with modernization (such as industrialization) and implementing swift policy changes to facilitate growth without giving Kigalois much time to adapt. Guiding us through the *Centre ville*, Djordjevic observes the ways that this telos of acceleration has been translated into Kigali's urban forms—such as the new numeric system for naming streets and the switch from French to English as the official language of instruction in schools—suggesting that it has created in its inhabitants a sense of constantly being "pushed along" and needing to "catch up," as well as a nagging fear that perhaps quality is being sacrificed in the name of speed.

Campos's experimental, multimedia piece is based on the author's experience of walking through the city of New York after a painful breakup and suggests several hypotheses regarding the role of affect in place-making. Campos filmed his walks through New York—each of which was accompanied by a particular soundtrack—and later reconstructed his experiences in written "mosaics." Urging us to see these narrativizations of his walks as performances of his practice rather than as mere illustrations of it, Campos emphasizes that it is through storytelling that theory emerges. Seeking to build on De Certeau's work in *L'invention du quotidien*, Campos argues that while attentive to the work of memory in the making of place, De Certeau "pays insufficient attention to the sentimental state of the walking subject." It is rather the walker's emotions that

"function as conditions of possibility for the serendipitous encounters and unexpected itineraries that constitute the enunciation of urban space." Campos explains that as he walked through Harlem and later through Times Square, his particular emotions of anger and sadness following his breakup allowed certain memories to emerge rather than others. These emotions, in turn, were products of a deeper, ineffable force, of *affect*. Drawing attention, for example, to how a green stoplight transports him to the beach in Italy with his former lover, Campos theorizes affect as "the fluid cementation of the connection between subjecthood and materiality," demonstrating how the self and the material world together "tamed" affect into the particular emotions that shaped his walks in New York City.

Such approaches to urban space—which consider not only how the city structures the experiences of urban dwellers but how they in turn produce the city—might seem far-removed from the purview of traditional urban planning, but how might they be integrated into the urban plans of the future? In their vivid designs for low-income housing development in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, Kwabena Abrah-Asiedu, Edward Becker, Osaruyi Igiehon, and Kayla Lim provide an image of what urban planning that takes into account local experiences, infrastructures, and social, cultural, and environmental factors might look like. These plans, which seek to grow public infrastructure while also creating opportunities for future private investment, draw upon local knowledge, materials, and structures, such as the Burkinabe wall, in order to create housing that works in harmony with local agriculture and commerce. Unlike most Burkinabe urban compounds, this development is designed vertically rather than horizontally in order to maximize space. Envisioned as bordering a greenbelt area where crops are already being grown informally,

the development will encourage further agricultural activity through the building of grain silos as part of the compound's walls, which will later be turned into communal chimneys as the need for living space increases. The compound's inner walls will help to protect crops from street traffic while the outer walls serve as important spaces of sociality. In the beautifully rendered images of the project, for example, we see this outside wall as a busy space of commerce and community: women sell mounds of vegetables grown in the greenbelt, children play, livestock roam, people chat, and vendors sell their wares. Abrah-Asiedu et al. also note that the housing project will preserve existing informal footpaths that crisscross through the greenbelt, thus facilitating access to its future homes and businesses and preventing the development from being isolated from the present landscape and community in the way that Eko Atlantic, Lakeside, and Hope City will be. I take the preservation of these paths as symbolic of the project's overall commitment to working with, rather than around, informal infrastructures and also find it to resonate with many of the essays here in its concern with the experience of walking the city. It is an example of urban planning that takes seriously the way that urban-dwellers themselves contribute to the city's creation.

By incorporating existing informal structures and ways of being into their vision for future low-income housing, Abrah-Asiedu et al. help us to think with new images and to create new urban vocabularies. The images of the project are equally, if not more, captivating than those of mega-developments like Eko Atlantic. As Jacques Rancière (2007) suggests, the power of the image is always two-fold. Images speak silently of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going; our communal history is inscribed on them, making their silent speech "more truthful than any

discourse proffered by a mouth" (13). But images are also powerful in their muteness, their "obstinate" refusal to signify anything but themselves. Long after it is realized that mega-developments like Hope City do not embody the collective future that many hope for, they nevertheless retain a certain mute power, all the more difficult to refuse because it is not articulated verbally. Perhaps these images can only be countered with others—with images that retain their "liberating power" and "incommensurable singularity," qualities that Rancière attributes to the speechless image and that are so necessary for radically new imaginations of the future, but that are also more inclusive and that speak of both a common past and a shared future (34). The essays collected here—which offer us glimpses of the streets of New York and Kigali, Henda's appropriated pedestals, informal structures along the Korle lagoon, and Kimbanguists at prayer—provide a kaleidoscope of counter-images of the urban future. Together, they make visible new ways of imagining Africa's future cities that are rooted in practices of connection and collectivity.

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