"Afrofuturist" Architecture

The Promises and Pitfalls of Future Architectural Imaginations

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Preface

Why did I Choose Afrofuturism?

The reason I chose to research and analyze the effectiveness of Afrofuturism's manifestation in architecture is because this movement is rooted in progress and change of the global perspective of African identity. Afrofuturism possesses the ability to be a significant catalyst for change. My research shows that Afrofuturist architecture has the power to revitalize Afrocentric communities and their view of the future. It also has the power to change Western perceptions of the African presence in the projected future. Analyzing the key factors that make Afrofuturism successful in architecture is necessary to progress this movement in the design world. Critiquing and analyzing media-labeled "Afrofuturist" architecture can shine light on the progressive power of future-focused architecture. But, the downfalls of media-labeled "Afrofuturist" architecture hinder that power that Afrofuturism promises. When the use of the word itself becomes a means of capitalistic, culturally exploitative endeavors, the power of Afrofuturism is stunted.

By identifying these downfalls, or areas of opportunity, and offering precedent successes in architecture, I believe designers and architects can contribute to the progression of the Afrofuturist movement. This is the goal of my research—that Afrofuturist architectural movements would flourish in the built environment. That these movements would promote a non-segregating, racially diverse, culturally colorful future for our African brothers and sisters and those who have cultural and ethnic African roots. The global perspective of the future, as it is experienced and projected in architecture, rests in the hands of those who form and mold the built environment. The potential shift of the global future—towards an equitable, racially represented, radical future—is near. I hope that the reader of this thesis would have a deeper

understanding of both the abstract nature of Afrofuturism and the tangible, real-world applications of this incredible movement in architecture. I hope my critique of these Afrofuturist architectural works proves essential for the proper progression of the movement.

In this thesis, I critically analyze media-labeled "Afrofuturist" architecture to open discourse in an untapped field related to Afrofuturism. Afrofuturism as a movement, aesthetic, and simply as a term can be appropriated by the other. It can be used for personal gain or commercial means, exploiting its power to create substantial change. Thinking critically of any movement is important to the success of that movement and identifying downfalls could lead to further progression of said movement's true influence.

Background

> *Isn't the unreal estate of the future already owned by the technocrats,*
> *futurologists, streamliners, and set designers — white to a man— who have*
> *engineered our collective fantasies?*
> (Dery 1994, 180)

This is the question that author, critic, and editorial consultant Mark Dery asked, which spurred him to research contemporary African futuristic narratives, or lack thereof, in the United States and in the Western world. The way the future has been presented, narrated, or visualized to global societies has been, for the most part, white dominated. Black futures have been wiped from global narratives, through a gross conglomeration of unjust acts. These include histories (and, for some, contemporary events) of slavery, the Transatlantic Slave Trade, colonialism, segregation, discrimination, misrepresentation of Black society, prejudice, and purposely neglecting to hire, publish, listen to, or see members of the Black community. The curation of a homogeneous, white future has systematically stunted the hopes and dreams of many. African

cultural futures have been silenced, covered up. Afrofuturism is a globalized and localized movement that speaks directly against those who have "engineered our collective fantasies", claiming that Africans and Black identities will now have a presence in the represented future (Dery 1994, 180). Through sculptural art, literary narratives, comic books, and many other artistic outlets, the ideals of Afrofuturism are visually unmistakable. These ideals drive narratives towards a broader future in which those who identify as African and/or Black are recognized and play an essential role in society. Afrofuturist narratives are championing the futures of Black people, whereas before they were purposely neglected. Afrofuturism's representation of the future is used as social commentary, champion Africans and those who identify as a part of Black communities of the world.

Afrofuturism is a lens through which we can see the world, but also a lens through which we can produce the world. Put on the lens in one's field of view, and the vision of the future (or even the vision of the past or present) drastically changes for the better. What if the world never experienced colonialism? How would this change the visualized/projected future? What if the world never experienced racism? How would that change the visualized/projected future? What if the world embraced cultural differences and implored people to be unique? What if the world empowered marginalized Africans and those of African heritage and sought equality in the materialized and systematic elements of society? All these speculative questions, some seemingly radical and some realistic, drive the ideals of Afrofuturism.

Disclaimers

In this research, I am not arguing that Afrofuturism's ideals exist in architecture, as many journalists and scholars have already identified that architecture is and/or can be a field through

which the cultural and social ideals of Afrofuturism are in fact manifested (see Coleman, Dery, and others). Rather, I am contributing a means of analyzing media-labeled "Afrofuturist" architecture, critiquing the progress or the hinderance of these architectural Afrofuturist narratives.

I also do not claim that Afrofuturism is an architectural movement in the typical sense. It is not likened to be nominal like "Modernism" or "Baroque," but rather Afrofuturism is the larger movement in which architecture participates. In its programming and its offered narrative, rather than simply in form or ornament, Afrofuturist architectural works can contribute to the shift of the projected future. I will be analyzing the aspects of "Afrofuturist" architecture that relate to a building's programming in realm and overall impact on the affected audience. I will not be specifically analyzing form, materiality, or other architectural elements, as that is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Abstract

"Afrofuturism" as a descriptive term is used by the media to label architectural works. However, there is little academic discourse to differentiate from the media. Afrofuturism holds extreme importance in the world today, utilized in a myriad of mediums. Although there is little research on the topic of Afrofuturist architecture, the field of architecture is not exempt from holding significant weight in the Afrofuturist movement. This thesis seeks to answer the following question as it relates to the setting and the influence of media-labeled "Afrofuturist" architecture: "How does Afrofuturist architecture contribute to—or detract from—equitable and just Afrofuturist imaginations of the future?" Through the creation of an analytical framework, drawn from precedent research on Afrofuturist works, and produced by two axes—speculative vs. realistic Afrofuturism and global vs. local influence—I identify and analyze Afrofuturism's architectural manifestations in four case studies. By critiquing these projects in terms of their existing realms and influence as they relate to Afrofuturism, I can analyze buildings' effectiveness as "Afrofuturist" works. The four main categories of Afrofuturist architecture, used for the purpose of critique, concluded from this study are global realistic, global speculative, local realistic, and local speculative. Critiquing the case studies in terms of their quadrant furthers my Afrofuturist and architectural commentaries, codifying and distilling the critiques, making this research repeatable in the future. And, with future research of additional case studies, the visual makeup of the analytical framework will assist commentators to direct critique to further the Afrofuturism movement in the field of architecture.

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Introduction: A Brief History of Afrofuturism and Why it's Relevant for Architects

> *Afrofuturism can be described as an emergent literary and cultural aesthetic that combines elements of science fiction, mysticism, magical realism, and Afrocentricity in order to critique not only the present-day dilemmas of people of color, but also to revise the future and re-examine the historical events of the past.*

(Daniels 2016, 12)

Afrofuturism is a concept that predates its own name, its seed planted during the Atlantic Slave Trade and European colonialism, as Africans narrated a future for themselves; a future of liberation, revolution, family, and of home. As Africans and those in the African diaspora have had to face the perils of the world throughout history, dreams of a brighter future manifested in storytelling, songs, drawings, and other narratives. Africans and those a part of Black communities have had to fight to have a glimpse of a better, possible future. Meanwhile, Europeans and Westerners alike have always projected the future as something attainable, affordable, and white. It is this reality that Afrofuturism seeks to address.

Afrofuturism has many different nuanced definitions. In short, Afrofuturism exists to reconfigure the narratives of the past, present, and the future to champion Black identities. My research seeks to name these Afrofuturist narratives as they pertain to architecture, both in the realistic realm and the speculative realm, to identify their primary audiences, to analyze their effectiveness, and to hopefully progress this information as it becomes more available to designers across the world.

Middle Passage Epistemology vs. Afrofuturism

Historically, Afrofuturism relates to all aspects of African and Pan-African identity. Adwoa Afful, the author of the journal article titled, "Wild seed: Africa and its many Diasporas," anchors the movement in the nineteenth century writing the following:

> Afrofuturism is a concept that is specific to the discourses of Black identity formation rooted in the aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade and later colonialism in Africa. It speaks directly to narratives of disorientation, rootlessness and hybridity, that are either rooted in or a critique of Middle Passage Epistemology (2016, 561).

She continues to discuss the Middle Passage epistemology (MPE) saying, "The Middle Passage epistemology (MPE) is a (nearly hegemonic) framework for understanding Black identity formation, based on a shared geographic as well as historical trajectory" (Afful 2016, 558). Instead of narrowly describing a shared set of geographically based stories, like works out of the MPE, Afrofuturism can be defined as a broader, more inclusive vision for both local and global futures. The Middle Passage Epistemology is not as relevant as Afrofuturism, as Afful explains, because Afrofuturism is shared globally as a movement for all Africans and global Black communities. The identity formation that is birthed from Afrofuturism as a global movement is not necessarily defined by a historical event or by a limited geographic culture. Therefore, it holds so much power today. Afrofuturism, as a holistic epistemology, is also a modern, global, powerful movement that is championing a brighter, global future.

My research is in response to this identified epistemology, specifically in the field of architecture. As Afrofuturism is a universal cultural movement, it is also universal in its mediums. Literature, fashion, art, music, dance, film, have all been critiqued through an Afrofuturist lens. However, architecture as an Afrofuturist medium has been absent from

substantial Afrofuturist critique. I desire to contribute to the Afrofuturist discourse through the utilization of my analytical framework and my critical analysis of my case studies.

Afrofuturism in Context: Film and Visual Arts

Although substantial architectural critiques have been seemingly absent form Afrofuturist discourse, Afrofuturism does have its roots in literature and has been emerging in other art and performance contexts. Specifically, film is a popular medium for the progression of Afrofuturism. One of the first, most recognizable Afrofuturist niche films is *Space is the Place* (1974). Dr. Ewa Drygalska, an expert on new technologies and cultural institutions, writes about this film stating, "Today, the movie and its score… are widely recognized as an early visual and aural manifesto of Afrofuturism, and a bold cinematic materialization of … mythology" (2019, 910). Drygalska, recognizing this materialization and visualization of Afrofuturism, alludes to *Space is the Place*, then writes about the film *Black Panther* (2018) saying the following:

> In the past five years, the Afrofuturist aesthetic has reemerged in popular culture. In film, Marvel Studios' blockbuster adaptation of the Marvel comic book Black Panther created an alternative, technologically advanced African state of Wakanda, questioning Western dominance in the area of scientific knowledge (Drygalska 2019, 911).

Movies and other means of visual arts are extremely significant when considering modern, global, Afrofuturism movements. Strong and Chaplin agree on the stance of this movie's significance writing, "Science fiction and media more generally have systematically neglected and narrowed Blackness; Black Panther was an undeniable expansion of Blackness" (Strong and Chaplin 2019, 58). They continue by explaining that the movie is "fueled by Afrofuturism, [and] it presents a world that both asks us to remember and acknowledge Africa as our root and understand social forces, like colonization, that have limited social progress" (Strong and

Chaplin 2019, 59). A major theme of the movie, and of Afrofuturism in general, is that it sometimes expresses itself apart from the realities of history and the present. Strong and Chaplin write, "The film's ability to imagine a futuristic and alternative uncolonized Africa provides audiences with positive portrayals of Africa beyond stereotypes of civil warfare and violence, disease, famine, and other social ills" (Strong and Chaplin 2019, 58). This is what Afrofuturism in both a historical and modern context can do; it could break down stereotypes and give the future a new visionary suggestion.

Analytical Framework: Mapping Futurism in Realm and Influence

My analytical framework consists of two considerations: the realm in which the work exists and its breadth of influence. Regarding the scope of my research—critiquing the media's use of the term "Afrofuturist" to describe architecture— these considerations hold merit when critiquing Afrofuturist architecture. The axes that makeup this analytical framework, applied to Afrofuturist architecture, are *realistic* vs. *speculative* realms of futurism and *global* vs. *local* influence of a specific work. In this chapter I discuss the literature surrounding these axes, the arguments against them, and ultimately how they relate to my architectural critique. To preface, I consistently use the terms *realistic* and *speculative* to describe futurism or Afrofuturism, but they are synonymous with a myriad of other literary terms. These include allegorical, when discussing *realistic* futurism, and fantasy, imaginative, utopian/dystopian, when discussing *speculative* futurism.

Realistic vs. Speculative (Afro)Futurism

In an essay titled *African Afro-Futurism: Allegories and Speculations,* South African researcher, musician, and activist, Gavin Steingo, writes:

> In this paper I examine a related—although not identical—tension within Afro-futurism, namely the tension between allegory and speculation. While these terms correspond roughly to the Soulful (humanism) and the Postsoul (posthumanism) respectively, shifting the discussion to allegory and speculation enables me to detect a crypto-humanism within posthumanist discourse (Steingo 2017, 45).

Speculative is synonymous to the imaginative impossible while *allegorical*, or as used in this thesis, *realistic*, relates to a work situated completely within the restraints of reality. These poles of futurism can be utilized to categorize works of Afrofuturism. Below are the literary discussions regarding both ends of the spectrum.

Speculative Futures

Speculative futurism is defined as the non-realist, imagined setting of the future. De'Anna Monique Daniels, the author of the Lehigh University graduate thesis titled,

Imagineering Black (Im)Possibility: Unearthing Afrofuturist Materialist Interventions, rhetorically questions, "(Afrofuturism) asks continually how do we get to a moment or a world in time, space, or reality where there are no more structures? Where's the post-racial world? Where is the world where categories of identity are no longer defined?" (2016, 7). Jane Bryce, author of, "African Futurism: Speculative Fictions and 'Rewriting the Great Book," answers these questions regarding the necessity of speculative fiction as it relates to Africa's future, claiming that an envisioned future in a speculative setting is "both a necessary and radically visionary act" (2019, 16). Mark Dery, who coined the term Afrofuturism in his seminal 1994 essay titled, *Black to the Future*, implies the following:

> If creative engagement with this situation is limited to the protocols of social realism or historical recovery (if, in other words, the techniques of (Science Fiction) are eschewed), then black literature has little or nothing to say about the technoscientific episteme in which we now live (Kilgore 2014, 3).

When considering these commentaries, speculation is crucial to the critiques of reality, and ultimately the change of reality for the purpose of equal racial and ethnic representation of the future.

Drygalska argues that in the movie *Space is the Place,* the absence of reality actually allows viewers to critically analyze reality. She writes the following:

> In the movie, political agendas and social demands were replaced with surrealism, suggesting that there can never be any salvation in the United States (or in the reality of the present in the United States), and hope found only in outer space. The film's anti-narrative aesthetic fosters critical readings focusing on potential futures and interventions in the present (Drygalska 2019, 927).

The argument for speculative futurism, and speculative Afrofuturism, is that it takes audiences out of reality, giving viewers a chance to experience a narrative without social ills at the forefront. Therefore, post-engagement, viewers eventually must face reality again. This cyclical, speculative experience allows the following: After exposure to impossible futures that champion Black identity and have equally represented narratives, viewers of Afrofuturist works can critically examine reality in a new way.

Nathaniel Coleman, author of the book, *Utopias and Architecture,* argues against the speculative, referencing architects who anchor their critique against the speculative future, or as some signify, utopia. He writes the following:

> In general, the world cannot wait for the architect to build his or her utopia…. (Also), using language like that of architectural theory, psychoanalysis also tends to diagnose utopia as a rejection of both living in reality and of complexity (Coleman 2007, 49).

Accordingly, Coleman argues that speculative futuristic architecture, framed as utopia, is a psychological rejection of reality, one that the world has no time to entertain. The South African Institute of Architects used their preface for their ArchitectureZA competition to suggest why speculative Afrofuturist architecture is not often used. They detail the following:

> African cities are often seen as too preoccupied with the problems of the present to speculate on an uncertain – and probably terrifying – future. Some would even argue that

African cities are the cities of the future, but in a 'watch-out-don't-let-it-happen-to-us' kind of way (2015, 1).

Thus, instead of the future of African cities seen as something tangible and exciting, the common view of positive speculative African architecture is that it is too impossible to reach. It is a utopia that is far from reality, and not worth even thinking about, because it is impossible to achieve. The projected negative future of the African city is seen by most of the world as a future full of poverty, degradation, and illness. By the constraints reality has on the world's vision of what the African future looks like, and due to the constraints reality has against the time and effort it would take to capitalize on speculative utopia, speculative futurism is criticized in the fields of futurism, Afrofuturism, and architecture.

Again, realistic legitimacy is the main argument used against the use of speculative futurism in general, and in architecture. Pia Ednie-Brown, Professor of Architecture at the University of Newcastle, writes about how an architectural project which is too unrealistic might not get published in a journal or magazine due to its lack of realistic legitimacy. The impossibility of a project diminishes the work's potential influence. She writes about a certain publication saying, "It simply aimed to collect 'a broad range of scattered design ideas and projects often dismissed as too speculative or simply project-hypothesis, and therefore currently unreported in architectural publications'" (Ednie-Brown 2013, 86). For architecture's Afrofuturist context, there are concerns and critiques regarding speculative works, which could potentially derail the Afrofuturist progress of the architectural canon.

Allegorical (Realistic) Futures

Although Daniels does mention how pertinent speculation is as a setting for Afrofuturism, her project is based in reality, or as she defines it, in the allegorical realm. She writes the following:

> Instead of constructing worlds with materials not readily available (i.e. cyborgs, advanced AI technology, post-racial identities, alien encounters, pandemics, and radical dystopian realities) Imagineering (Im)possibility ushers in the use of materials, texts, embodied expressions, and art that has been constructed, imagineered from contexts that are available for mining (Daniels 2016, 8).

She creates a project out of readily available, realistic materials and opposes (some of) the completely imagined, unrealistic elements that can be seen in some speculative future narratives.

Williams-Wynn and McCulloch contribute to the discussion of utopianism as speculative futurism, in favor of the realistic realm. Specifically, they comment on the realities of South Africa, and how those realities cannot significantly change with the production of speculative, utopian narratives of the future. The following is an excerpt from their work titled, "Between the Archive and the Real: Contemporary Digital Art and South Africa," in which they further the discussion regarding utopian globalism as a speculative future. They write the following:

> Counter to the discourses of utopian globalism, the local conditions of South African experience are stressed. Despite the increased adoption and use of digital technology, the fractures of the Apartheid period persist. There remain 'decisive underlying social, ideological (racism), and economic factors that result in structural inequalities' in terms of digital technologies, such that white South Africans are over-represented in terms of access to, and use of, digital media (Williams-Wynn and McCulloch 2015, 418).

Williams-Wynn and McCulloch claim that with too many technologically driven, speculative/utopian narratives, there can be a skewed portrayal of what is actually happening in South Africa. They, along with the authors above, are in favor of realistic, or allegorical, portrayal of future narratives, as opposed to speculative narratives.

Michael Godby, author of, "Color in the Representation of the South African Townships," poses a good question critiquing the allegorical, or realistic, realm. He questions whether news coverage and artistic representation of township, or informal settlement, life is actually exploitation and cultural appropriation, contributing to the single story of how an Africa is a glorified tragedy represented to the Western world. He answers, specifically addressing South African artist Zwelethu Mthethwa's contribution to the field of photography, by arguing that Mthethwa's images reinforce a "framework of globalist reference" (Godby 2009, 75). He writes that these photographs combine "social realism" with "pop imagery", essentially appropriating the reality that South Africans face in the setting of townships (Godby 2009, 75). He critiques that the processes of globalization take advantage of the hardships faced in the reality of South Africa. Godby suggests that there is a possibility for exploitation or misinterpretation when works are solely based in the present, omitting any hope for a better future of African townships. That is what happened with Mthethwa's photographs: they were known in the photography world to be based in realistic or allegorical realm, but used as a means of political, capitalist, and popularity gains. Godby goes as far as to ask about South Africa's reality and how it relates to its future; is it only going to end in hardship, because South Africa's reality is characterized by "realistic" media as hardship? (Godby 2009, 75). Straying from the purely allegorical might offer possibilities of a different future for South Africa and Africa as a whole, as opposed to the appropriated "realities" that many artists capitalize on.

There are some critics who offer strict commentaries for either speculative or realistic futurism, but there are many scholars who see the advantage to both. Coleman, taking an architecture-focused view of the realistic verses the speculative, writes the following:

> Architectural projects are a kind of fiction comparable to utopias. Drawings, including plans, sections and elevations (among other expressive representations) are the rhetorical

means by which the non-reality of design is persuasively proposed as real long before, if ever, being constructed" (2007, 46).

Anything that is not actually constructed in the built environment is skewed a bit away from reality, towards imaginary, or speculative, sometimes allowing for potential realization (Coleman 2007, 46). Guneri agrees, quoting Coleman, "This imaginary (is) similar to architectural projection, and it guides the 'exploration of architects who envision an exemplary architecture as a setting for social life, as utopias envisage wholes made up of interdependent parts'" (2019, 155). Guneri continues, supporting the argument that there is an in-between-state of architectural speculation and realism when she introduces her research by stating the following:

> This proposed reading departs from the fact that there are various degrees of convergence between the architectural real and the architectural imaginary, some of which are under-discussed if not totally dropped beneath the radar (2019, 154).

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, authors of *Speculative Everything*, sum up this "in-between" state of speculative and realistic futurism when they state the following:

> It strives to overcome the invisible wall separating dreams and imagination from everyday life, blurring distinctions between the "real" real and the "unreal" real. The former exists in the here-and-now, whereas the latter lies behind glass screens, within the pages of books, and locked in people's imaginations. Design speculations can give form to the multiverse of worlds our world could be. Whereas it is accepted that the present is caused by the past it is also possible to think of it being shaped by the future, by our hopes and dreams for tomorrow (2014, 160).

In summary, both realistic architectural drawings and the idealized, speculative settings of architectural projects hold merit in the design world. Architecture projections, such as renderings, elevations, sections, and floor plans, can be the bridge between both realistic and speculative futures. My research will bring to light this under-discussed spectrum of Afrofuturism: the speculative vs. the realistic realm of futurism.

Global vs. Local: Influences of Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism has distinct influences at local and global levels. Both relate to how individuals and communities are affected by the ideas and the promises Afrofuturism offers. Author, filmmaker, independent scholar, and dance therapist, Ytasha Womack, states the following regarding the importance of Afrofuturism's influence on the individual person:

> Afrofuturism is a great tool for wielding the imagination for personal change and societal growth. Empowering people to see themselves and their ideas in the future gives rise to innovators and free thinkers, all of whom can pull from the best of the past while navigating the sea of possibilities to create communities, culture, and a new, balanced world (Womack 2013, 191).

As Womack explains, a personal identification with Afrofuturism could lead to a world of new future possibilities. Individual influence is essential for the progression of Afrofuturism and is necessary when critiquing the influence of Afrofuturist architecture works. If one individual, or a local community of individuals is positively influenced by an Afrofuturist space, Womack argues that this could create new culture, and progressively a new world.

Afrofuturism also has influence on a more global scale, in which many mindsets are changed with the projection of an Afrofuturist vision of the future. Womack also comments on the global influence of Afrofuturism, and how it is crucial to changing the global perspective of Africans and people of color. She writes the following:

> Afrofuturism encourages the beauties of African diasporic cultures and gives people of color a face in the future… (Afrofuturists) are all aware that the future, technology, and the scope of imagination have unlimited potential that culture can inform (Womack 2013, 192).

Globally, Afrofuturism represents Africans and those of African diasporic cultures, championing a projected future of equality and culture. As mentioned above, works like the movie *Black*

Panther and other influential arts have global influence, using Afrofuturism to change the global, collective perspective of a more equitable and just future.

When discussing and critiquing Afrofuturist influence at both a local and global scale, it is important to recognize the producers of culture at both a local and global scale. Locally, culture production belongs to the individual and the group of individuals within a community. However, too often, local cultures get masked by global ones. Consider the events of colonization in Africa, for example. Loss of language, cultural norms, societal structures, food production, clothing, and identity occurred with the implementation of Eurocentric power. Therefore, it is imperative to identify whether an "Afrofuturist" work has global or local influence, as the global influences are notorious for destroying local culture.

To speak to producers of culture at a global level, the most powerful information drivers of the world (media, magazines, people of power, etc.) control what the mass consumer receives as information. Tegan Bristow, in her article titled, "From Afro-Futurism to Post African Futures," mentions that there is a market-driven force taking advantage of Afrofuturist works. She writes the following:

> African specific knowledge around technology is currently dominated by the ICT (Information and Communications Technology) industry, which focuses on knowledge for market development and somewhat romantic notions of 'indigenized innovation'... Meaning that an understanding of the cultural implications and evolving aesthetics and aesthetic mechanisms are understood too broadly and through rather small lenses (Bristow 2014, 168).

Bristow is critiquing the large, technologically capitalistic companies that skew African culture for monetary gain. She concludes that there is an aesthetic-driven market that sells a stereotypical "Africa" to the globe. Non-Africans are devouring information that is too generalized and too romanticized to be impactful in an Afrofuturist sense. She calls for a focus

on Afrofuturism in order to protect its purer purposes in how local African culture is projected to the world (2014, 168). Analyzing "Afrofuturist" architecture at a global level is imperative to the discourse of Afrofuturism in order to protect true Afrofuturist works and to heavily critique those that fall short of Afrofuturism's promises.

In my analytical framework, the axis of the global vs. the local consumption of Afrofuturism is important to include because the consumers of Afrofuturism determine how Afrofuturist culture is received and how it progresses. Each pole of this spectrum is significant to the progression of Afrofuturist architecture.

Putting it All Together: How this Relates to Architecture/Methods

Afrofuturism clearly lends itself to critique within the axes of speculative vs. realistic futurism and the global vs. local influences. Critiquing Afrofuturist architectural works within these axes of analysis enables me to identify effectiveness of works that are speculative, realistic, or "tension between envisioned ideals and existing reality" and works that have global or local influence (Coleman 2005). Using a categorization method and analytical framework inspired by the poles of realism vs. speculation, and global audiences vs. local audiences as they relate to Afrofuturism, a focused, productive critique can be started in order to progress the Afrofuturist movement in the field of architecture.

Research Design

My research design reflects precedents in other art critique and Afrofuturist discourse. Through the creation of my analytical framework, containing the speculative vs. realistic and the global vs. local axes, I can critique media-labeled "Afrofuturist" architecture. My case selection and method of analysis is unique to discourse in the fields Afrofuturism and architecture. In this chapter I explain my literary precedents from which I produce my analytical framework, I discuss my case study selection process, and I explain the significance of my mode of analysis.

Methodological Framework: Literary Precedents

Drygalska is in support of examining and analyzing works from different time periods in an Afrofuturist perspective because, "We can retroactively discover that the two visions of liberation coexisted: ... one turned toward history and the other toward the future. It is the former that prevailed over the latter, less-known experimental alternative" (2019, 927). This lesser-known, experimental alternative, as Drygalska explains to be speculative futurism, has not been researched in depth before. Related to speculative architecture, Guneri uses a definition of "utopia as method" in order to provide the analytical framework to dissect architectural movements. She writes, "As a means, this scrutiny proposes a method, if not a systematic manner of approach, to achieve a comprehensive and non-reductive understanding of the varieties of relationship between architectural utopianism and architectural production" (Guneri 2019, 161). Therefore, critiquing speculative architecture (in this case utopianism) and how it relates to architecture is a method to approach the understanding of architectural relationships. She continues by stating the purpose of critique saying, "This is to equip contemporary

architectural thinking with means… to span the gap between the protectionist, the small-scale, the introverted and the grand, the complex, and the extroverted" (Guneri 2019, 161). Again, the purpose of critique, according to Guneri, is to survey the relationships of architectural axes.

Like Guneri's goal of closing the gap between the introverted and the grand (this can all be likened to what I am identifying as allegorical vs. speculative), Rashid et al. write the following:

> Frederick Kielser once proposed 'co-realism', a theoretical model with four poles (humans, forms, space, and time)... through all of this, we have to make sure the question of the future always remains open… Imagination is a form of information that is embedded in the future (2017, 12).

I adopted the analytical framework containing four poles, but rather mine are identified as global, local, speculative Afrofuturist and realistic Afrofuturist. My framework is less a model, but rather a means to identify and analyze certain architectural works that are placed somewhere along those poles. Sofia Samatar, poet, writer, and Assistant Professor of English at James Madison University, also created frameworks of analysis regarding diasporic futurism "that require, and will reward, further research, such as posthumanism, time travel as resistance, and the philosophy of the remix" (2017, 175). My hope is that my analytical framework will inspire new research regarding architecture and Afrofuturism, as seen in Kielser's and Samatar's precedent methodology examples. Previous futuristic and Afrofuturist frameworks can inform a new one related to architecture. Regarding an analysis of speculative Afrofuturism, anthropologist Dr. Michael Stasik asserts:

> For understanding how fantasy (or speculative futurism) works, we need to focus on the specific practices, experiences, and the relations of those who indulge in these fantasies (or speculative futures) and invest them with meaning" (2016, 217).

This meaning Stasik mentioned will be one that I derive from a methodology of an analytical framework I create using a combination of the above authors' methods.

Case Selection and Analysis

I will be analyzing the following, media-labeled "Afrofuturist" case studies: The Zeitz MOCAA Museum, the architecture in Wakanda in *Black Panther*, the Gugu S'Thebe Theatre in Cape Town, South Africa, and the work titled *Shanty Mega-Structures* by Olalekan Jeyifous, an art installation that is available for viewing on online platforms as well as in person in chosen art galleries.

I ultimately chose these case studies based on their availability for analysis from remote locations (I am writing this from the United States, so making sure that enough literature and other media covered these works in depth was essential) and the medias' usage of the adjective "Afrofuturist" to describe these works, which is essential to the critique of Afrofuturist architecture. By focusing on a few geographic areas (relatively; Cape Town, South Africa), and by carefully choosing case studies that have been media-labeled as "Afrofuturist" (which are few and far between), I eliminate potentially skewed factors of cultural differences and geographic differences from my analyses and critiques.

The reasoning behind these choices lie both in their representations of the relative, localized geographic locations, and, for Black Panther and Zeitz MOCAA, their global influence. Jeyifous' work lies right in the middle of the local-global spectrum, giving the chosen case studies a breadth of representation for the audience axis of my analytical framework grid. Regarding the speculative/realistic axis, these works also give a breadth of range, with Wakanda

and Jeyifous' work settling in the speculative end of the spectrum, and the other two case studies sprinkled toward the realistic end of the spectrum.

I place them on my framework grid using literature and evidence to justify my placement. Then, using said framework, I critique the effective aspects and the less-effective aspects of the architecture work. Utilizing a color-coding system, I graphically represent the effectiveness of each architectural work on my analytical framework grid, thereby initiating a global survey of all the case studies compiled. I then make critical conclusions on the overall state of the conglomeration of my case studies and how they promise or hinder progression of the Afrofuturist movement.

The hope of this study is that after more case studies are analyzed, the benefits and pitfalls of each type of Afrofuturist architecture will be clearer to the consumers of this information (the layman, critical scholars, Afrofuturist champions, and designers alike). Most importantly, though, this critique highlights the power of Afrofuturist architecture. It reveals the case studies that are championing the movement architecturally. This method of critique also allows for a deeper conversation regarding the unfulfilled promises of some media-labeled Afrofuturist architectural works. This method of critique broadens the discourse surrounding Afrofuturism.

Analysis

In the analysis that follows, I use the analytical framework containing the speculative vs. realistic and the global vs. local axes, placing each architectural work and analyzing accordingly. The critiques I offer, catalyzed by the axes, are critical to identifying where the true power of architectural Afrofuturism lies, and where the major downfalls exist. The framework categories are used as a means of codifying and distilling the analysis and can be used for additional case studies in future research.

Zeitz MOCAA, Cape Town, South Africa

Baan, Iwan. *Zeitz MOCAA Cape Town – Thomas Heatherwick* (2017).

In February of 2014, Heatherwick Studio was appointed to the role of designing the new Zeitz MOCAA museum. The studio was commissioned to "Reimagine the complex with an architectural intervention inspired by its own historic character" (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa 2019, 1). With this hefty aspiration, the architects initiated this endeavor with a history-

focused mindset, maintaining the exteriors of the sixteen, large, 100-year-old grain silos that tower above Cape Town's waterfront. Carved interiors create a grand, honeycomb like experience, magnifying the height of the silos and the simplicity of the interior architecture. This building is labeled as an "Afrofuturist" building by many media sources (for example, see Vanessa Louie's article titled, "6 Jaw Dropping African Architectural Pieces That Celebrate Afrofuturism"), mostly due to its magnified structure and material use. The glass orbs sitting at the top of this building offer unprecedented views of Cape Town. This building provides an innovative, materialistically unique, interior and exterior building experience.
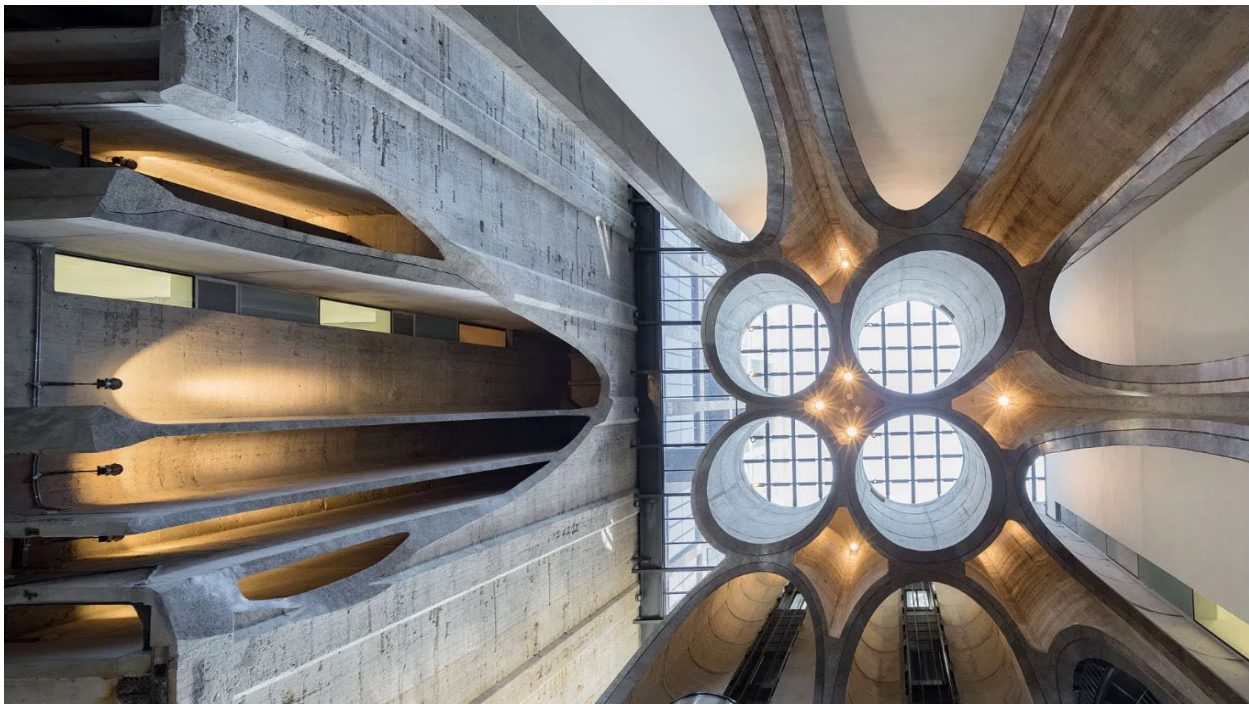
Baan, Iwan. *Zeitz MOCAA Cape Town – Thomas Heatherwick* (2017).

The Zeitz MOCAA is situated on the V&A Waterfront, a collection of private land spanning the coast of the Central Business District, which sees millions of international tourists every year. The area currently attracts 24 million local and global visitors per year with its shopping mall, marina, high-end hotels, retail stores, and consultancy firms enticing high

amounts of pedestrian and boat traffic (Emeran and Human 2019. 1). Most of its revenue comes from tourists as opposed to local visitors, as well as private grants and donations (Emeran and Human 2019, 1).

While this museum is located on private property and curated for the tourist experience, the museum does participate in more localized endeavors. The Museum itself writes the following:

> The project is a first and unique public/private partnership in South Africa that will additionally breathe life into the Silo district and act as a drawcard to a venture that is non-commercial in nature and is designed specifically for the enjoyment of all the continent's citizens (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa 2019).

However, this intention has not been fully realized. There have been perfunctory efforts of the museum to give access to the less-wealthy citizens of Cape Town, including offering free museum entrance to African citizens on Wednesday mornings (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa 2019). If the V&A Waterfront in its programming is curated to be for tourists, the wealthy, and the Westerners, why would a simple intention statement or the negligible price of a ticket during a work day entice any local Cape Town citizens to visit the museum? To some, it seemed as if the V&A Waterfront is in another country, let alone in an area that claims to be for the people of Cape Town.

The museum is isolated by its physical factors— being on the waterfront, one of the most expensive pieces of land in all South Africa—in addition to its cultural factors—the V&A waterfront is a touristy anomaly in Cape Town. When one steps outside of the confines of the Aquarium, the Ferris wheel, the 5-star restaurants and boat tours, they are met with the real Cape Town. A town where an isolated museum in the heart of the Waterfront is not necessarily accessible or welcoming to the local people. This is where the influence of the Zeitz MOCAA

museum lies— it is marketed and situated to be most accepting to tourists, which is reflected in the V&A visitor numbers (24 million people per year), and places itself towards a more global audience on the axis. However, it has potential to be more local, and arguably has an ethical responsibility to be more local, but as it exists now its Afrofuturist portrayals are received by the global rather than the local.

Baan, Iwan. *Zeitz MOCAA Cape Town – Thomas Heatherwick* (2017).

The Zeitz MOCAA museum exists in actual materiality- a built structure that people can interact with, both tangibly and programmatically. When considering reality vs. speculation, the mere fact that this structure is an operable museum tips the scales toward the reality pole. However, there is one aspect of this structure that diverges it from being completely a work of realism.

The element of speculation that exists within this built structure and its programming is that, as a vocalized "representative of Cape Town, South Africa and its peoples," it is situated on private land that is inherently inaccessible and exclusionary to a majority of Cape Town's population, namely its lower-income population (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa 2019). Due to the dissonance between what the Zeitz MOCAA claims to be and what it actually is in reality (who it serves and how they fall short of claims to be for the people), this gives some sort of speculative, nonrealistic characteristic to the existence of this building and its portrayal to its audience. Maybe the museum's hope to someday serve the entire makeup of Cape Town's demographics will be realized, making it swing back to be a completely realistic Afrofuturist work. In the meantime, while this dissonance exists, there exists an element of speculation, rooted in the museums' written manifesto, that is still unreached.
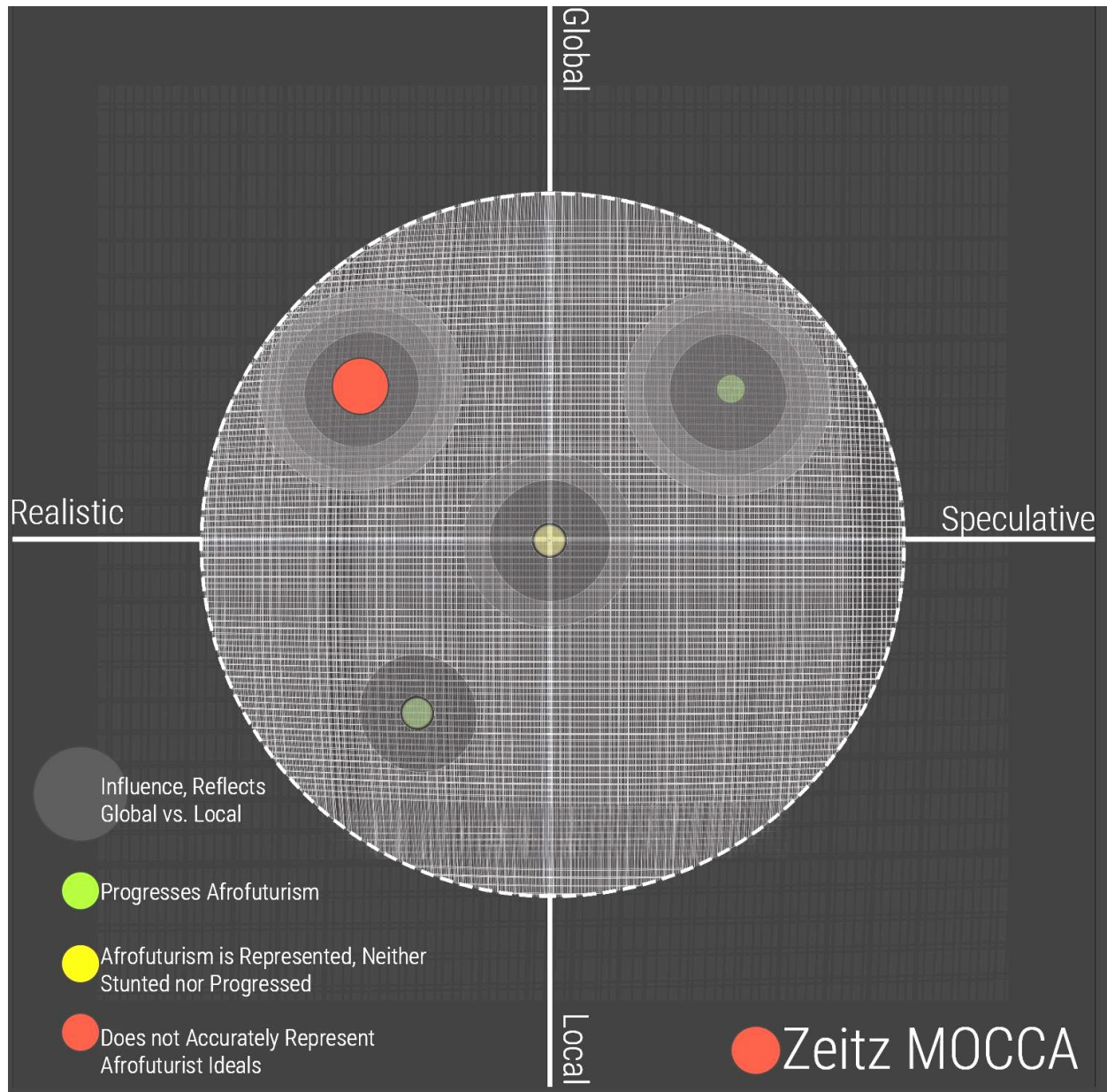
Using the framework, the Zeitz MOCAA museum is named as a global, realistic Afrofuturist architectural work. The responsibility for this museum to change its audiences' perceptions of the future weighs heavily on the following observation: it is directed and marketed towards a mass number of tourists, and hosts real-life interactions with architecture and art. The Zeitz MOCAA can offer a tangible, livable experience that many Afrofuturist works in general, including architectural works, are not able to offer to viewers.

Regarding its responsibility towards its audience, the museum writes the following on its website: "This record number of inaugural year visitors (over 350,000) positions Zeitz MOCAA as the most highly attended art museum on the African continent" (Museum of Contemporary Art Africa 2019). The potential influence here is incredibly enormous. Columnist Ashraf Jamal mentions the museum's goals of being a catalyst for a paradigm shift stating, "Such an initiative requires a high level of curation, for the museum can play a huge role in the perception of the continent by leap-frogging cliched perceptions of Africa" (2017, 1). The architecture is not anything more than a carved-out silo with glass orbs crowned atop. However, the curation inside the museum is what is currently altering the experiences of the users. The art itself may be "Afrofuturist", but the building that encases the art should be heavily critiqued if it is also to be called "Afrofuturist." Therefore, the ways in which the museum was created, programmed, and marketed to the world encompasses this critique. It can be argued that The Zeitz MOCAA as architecture is falling short of the potential for a whole African narrative. In its choice of a European architect, its marketing to tourists, and its neglect to offer architectural substantiality for the future perspectives of many Cape Town citizens, the Zeitz MOCAA museum is an example of an upper class, exclusionary, media-labeled "Afrofuturist" work.

Wakanda

Seymour, Mike. https://www.fxguide.com/fxfeatured/black-panther-building-wakanda.
The Afrofuturist design of Wakanda and its capital, Golden City. Marvel Studios

Wakanda is the fictional setting for the movie *Black Panther*, a Marvel movie released in February of 2018. The prologue of *The Black Panther* narrates this imagined world as follows: "Unfet-tered by the yoke of colonization, the African warrior nation of Wakanda flourished and became a high-tech, resource-rich, ecologically-sound paradise—one that makes the rest of the world seem primitive in comparison" (Black Panther 2018, prologue). Filled with architectural visualizations, African cultural motifs, and utopian city projections, this movie reimagines what a country untouched by history could, and possibly should, look like.

Easily, this architectural Afrofuturist work can be placed more towards the global pole of the local-global spectrum. Writer Jamil Smith explains, "*Black Panther* is the 18th movie in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, a franchise that has made $13.5 billion at the global box office over the past 10 years" (1). This statement alone makes *Black Panther* extremely significant as a part of the Marvel movies, a collection of world-wide cinematic influences which grace the screens of thousands of movie theaters and televisions across the globe. Smith continues commenting on the influence this movie has on its audience:

> *Black Panther* is emblematic of the most productive responses to bigotry: rather than going for hearts and minds of racists, it celebrates what those who choose to prohibit equal representation and rights are ignoring, willfully or not. They are missing out on the full possibility of the world and the very America they seek to make 'great.' They cannot stop this representation of it (1).

Not only has this movie undoubtedly reached the eyes and ears of those who were previously ignorant of any racial and ethnic injustice happening in the world, but it also teaches those who are a part of the Afrofuturist movement how to deal with adversity. The visual projection of architecture in this movie is a significant supporting element to the overall message that the movie is advertising: a message of equality and justice. This movie touches the lives of Africans and those in Black communities across the globe, empowering them to fight for social justice and

for their futures. This movie reaches all people: people who support the movement and people whose perspectives of the future can be changed through the means of Afrofuturist exposure.

While *Black Panther* is placed towards the global pole of the spectrum, it can also be argued that there are localized benefits to this movie's architectural projections and overall message. As a localized example, *Black Panther* showcases fashion motifs from Zulu culture in South Africa. Chutel and Kazeem write about this Zulu motif, commenting on the inspired outfits designed by Carter, "For Black Panther, Carter had [a character's] dramatic white isiolo 3D-printed", showcasing how local technology and local cultural motifs made up elements of this movie (2018, 1). While the architecture of Wakanda is not necessarily linked to a specific local influence, the Afrofuturism in the movie itself is. Other aspects of the movie, like fashion mentioned above, showcase elements of local African cultures. This changes how Africans, how those of African descent, and how the people of the world see more localized cultural iconography (Chutel and Kazeem 2018, 1). Holistically, the architectural influence of Wakanda speaks to a more global audience, but when analyzing the local elements used in the movie and when identifying smaller communities that have been affected positively by the movie, it can be inch toward the local pole.

While the film provides social commentary on very human-centered, socially realistic topics, the architecture of Wakanda is far from being realistic itself. With cultural allusions, skyscrapers, and magnificent "virtual reality" aesthetic accomplishments, Wakanda as a place is completely imagined. It still retains a semi- "believable" look, thanks to the film's graphics team. Reporter Patrick Sisson comments on the realistic nature of this movie when he writes,

"When reality is so bound up in issues of place and separation—redlining, urban segregation, and the jarring impact of the slave trade, a forced trip to an entirely alien world—it follows that

fictional commentary would mine these rich veins of common experience" (2018). The fictional environment that Wakanda embodies is purposeful in that it allows the audience to be completely removed from reality, presenting a new vision of the future that the audience might not have ever imagined before. The movie therefore allows the audience to view reality in a new, hopefully Afrofuturist, and pro-Black way.

Although there are some elements of reality in this movie, the architecture of Wakanda is placed toward the speculative pole. Strong and Chaplin write, "The film's ability to imagine a futuristic and alternative uncolonized Africa provides audiences with positive portrayals of Africa beyond stereotypes of civil warfare and violence, disease, famine, and other social ills" (Strong and Chaplin 2019, 58). This "alternative, technologically advanced" city-state of Wakanda allows viewers to imagine a world absent of the ills Africans and those of African descent have had to endure, and still endure today. The removal of reality creates a new, imagined reality based on community power, Black power, and cultural integrity. Though impossible, and built out of an imagined material, the speculative, architectural nature of Wakanda gives viewers a new perspective on what the future could hold, and what it could have held if history were to rewrite itself. After the above synthesis, Wakanda is placed towards the speculative pole on the realistic-speculative axes.
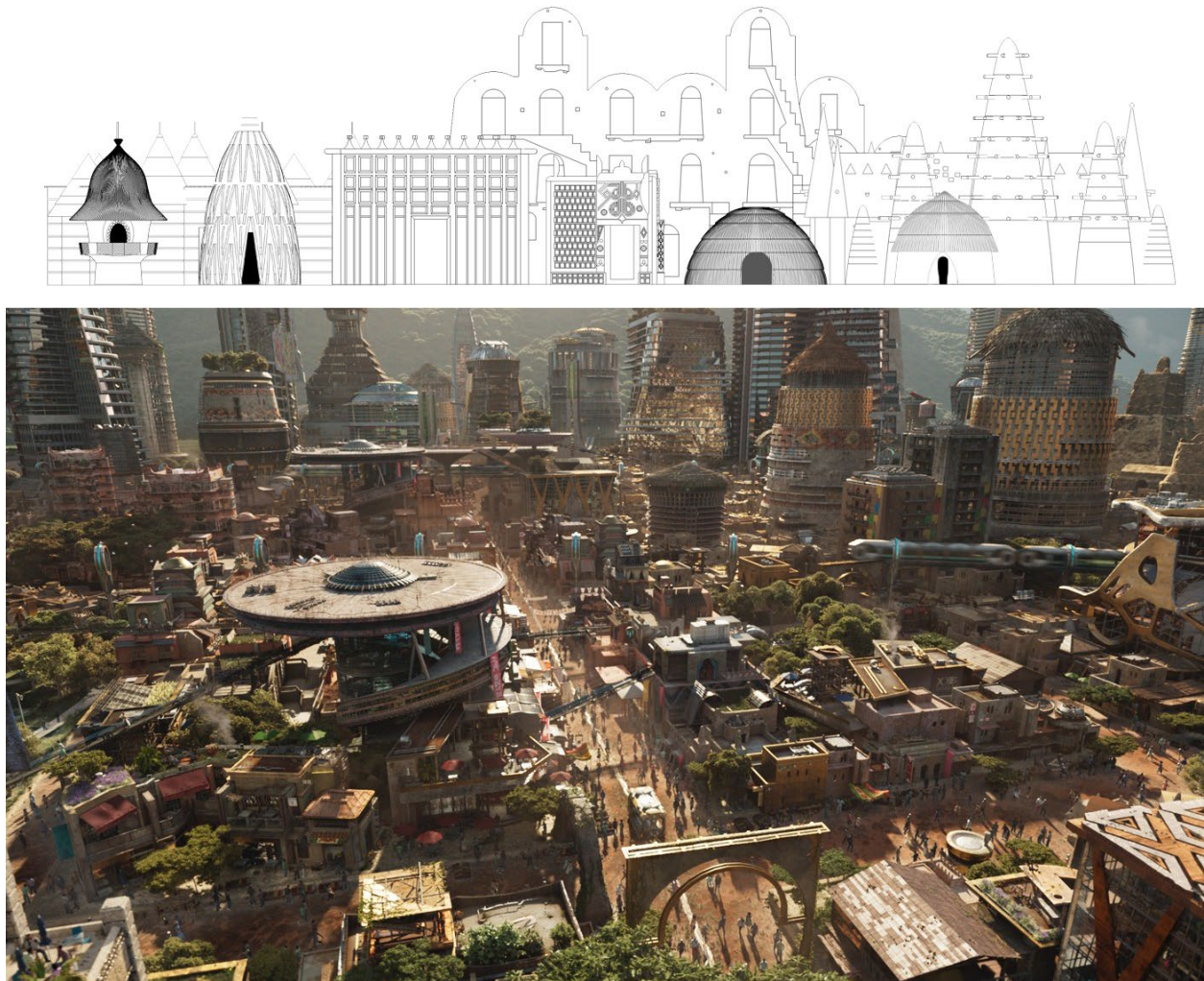
Aston, Sam. *Architectural Interpretations of Wakanda.* 2018.
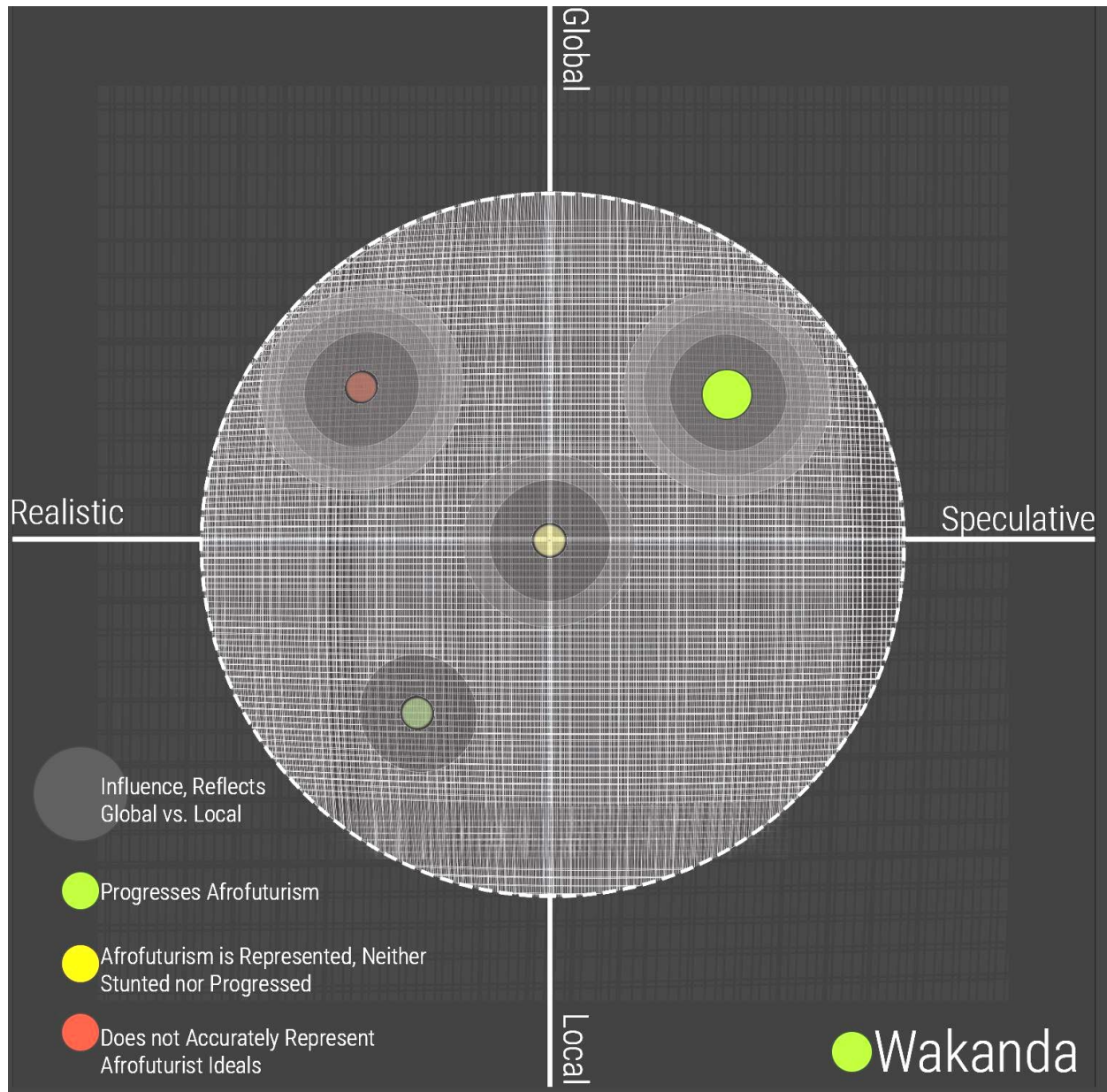
Wakanda as the setting of *Black Panther* completely reimagines a Black-centered future by creating an architectural portrayal of what "could have" or "should have" been despite historical realities that still plague the world today. This movie promotes the essential ideals of what Afrofuturism is—a renewed worldview of what Africans and those in the African Diaspora can create and contribute to the world's future. Through its architectural portrayal—a grand nod to highly technological and engineered materials and methods—Wakanda became an

empowering speculative vision to Africans and Black communities alike. Strong and Chaplin agree on this stance of Wakanda's impact writing, "Science fiction and media more generally have systematically neglected and narrowed Blackness; Black Panther was an undeniable expansion of Blackness" (2019, 58). It is by removing reality and portraying Wakanda that the movie, in turn, begs the audience to reflect on reality. Wakanda and its architectural grandeur empowers Africans and Black communities by giving them a new world-wide perspective on what could be. It equally allows all who do not feel the effects of discriminatory futurology to reflect on reality while reimagining an Afrofuturist future.

Arts and Culture Center Guga S'Thebe

CS Studio Architects. *Guga S'Thebe Arts, Phase 1: Culture and Heritage Village.*

The local, realistic Afrofuturist architectural works are harder to identify, as they are not typically covered by media and academia, and not often identified as "Afrofuturist". However, The Guga S'Thebe Theater is an example of what has been likened to and compared to other "Afrofuturist" works (see Seed Network's article, "Announcing 2017 Award Winners"), and so it can be labeled as a local, realistic Afrofuturist architectural work. This building changes the locals' perspectives of their current living situation in the townships and offers spaces for business and exchanges of goods. This tangibly changes the locals' visions of possibilities for their future. Located in Langa, one of Cape Town's largest townships, the Arts and Culture Guga S'Thebe complex and Theater is an Afrofuturist building due to its programming, its cultural meeting center which catalyzes income for the township, and its influence in changing the

narrative of the locals' future. Steingo quotes South African author Pumla Gqola in his article saying:

> (Townships) are both the geographical ghettos that have come to define 'authentic' Blackness and the mentality that polices legitimate forms of Blackness. Townships are a white supremacist construction, and although they have been shaped by vibrancy, defiance and counter-cultures, the time to claim the world beyond township borders has long been with us" (Steingo 2013, 65).

This project allows the township locals to tangibly change the narrative of their own present and futures (which was constructed by white supremacism, particularly during apartheid) by creating community, educating in trade crafts, and providing a place for vendors to sell goods and services.

The Guga S'Thebe Culture & Art Center, its main complex area designed by Carin Smuts, is an icon of Langa, with its colorful facade and cultural allusions utilized throughout the building's interiors and the structure itself (Guga S'Thebe 2020, 1). The Guga S'Thebe Children's Center, an addition built in 2016, exemplifies Afrofuturist, realistic architecture (Guga S'Thebe 2020, 1). Nnamdi Elleh, Associate Professor of Architecture History and Theory at Northwestern University, writes about the new vernacular which must be utilized in order to change the perspectives of the future as they relate to Africans and the diaspora when stating the following:

> If a new approach and methodology for describing the neighborhoods of the underprivileged classes is to be formulated, the architect must first learn to describe these neighborhoods using the language of what exists on the ground. Such a language can be seen as the language of everyday life, a language which, like the African artist, respects and represents the lives of the people (2011, 43).

The Guga S'Thebe Children's Center designers used the language of Langa's ground to inform the building materials, orientation, circulation, and programming of the building in order to

participate in championing Afrofuturist ideals, which start at paying homage to history and to the present conditions of the site.

Gleich, Wieland. *Guga S'Thebe Children's Theatre.*

This work is not entirely skewed towards the local pole, as a lot of the funding and construction of this work came from NGOs and outside institutions. These include the Georgia Institute of Technology, the Peter Behrens School of Arts, RWTH Aachen University, AIT-ArchitekturSalon, the City of Cape Town, CS Studio Architects, and the Image Structure GmbH (Guga S'Thebe Children's Theatre, 1). For this reason, there is a slight shift toward the global pole.

The Guga S'Thebe Arts and Culture Center has little global influence. But it has some outside influence, due to its attraction to tourists and due to the collaboration of designers and schools that worked on the Children's Theater. Mzu Lembeni, a local from Khayelitsha, another major township in Cape Town, has dedicated his career to giving township tours in order to educate visitors on the realities of township life. He writes on his website:

> Since 2011, (I have) operated more than 10,000 township tours and connected thousands more tourists with Cape Town's township communities enriching the lives of tourists, and

by their presence, the material lives of the locals, because (I believe in) 'sharing the love' (Imzu Tours 2020).

These township tours have become an economic and career building mechanism for the inhabitants of Langa, Khayelitsha, and the "Cape Town Flats" alike (Imzu Tours 2020). The destination for most of these tours is the Guga S'Thebe Arts and Culture center, as tourists can shop in the art markets and experience the unique, family-oriented culture of the Theater and its surrounding programmed buildings.

Both local-realistic Afrofuturist buildings, located at the Guga S'Thebe site, are labeled as local because of their geographic location and their intent to better the local community of Site C, Khayelitsha. The complex stands out amongst the corrugated metal and temporary housing structures with its bright colors, Langa motifs (Langa means Sun in Xhosa, one of the local languages), and the sounds of giddy children and market exchanges. As someone who went on one of Mzu's tours, I was able to experience Langa as a foreigner. Mzu continually narrated the impoverished life struggles of the inhabitants of Langa, emphasizing the lack of resources, the spread of diseases, and the hopelessness many of the people have succumbed to since being relocated to the flats during apartheid. He told me that government-sanctioned segregation led to what I saw that day: endless miles of shipping container housing and scrap metal structures— home for many. There were a few structures that were made of sound concrete blocks and mortar, which Mzu explained were service projects sponsored by wealthy organizations from Ireland. Many non-profit organizations build in the townships of Langa and Khayelitsha (for better or for worse) and Mzu says that they need more resilient structures in order to improve the housing situations in the Cape flats. The Guga S'Thebe building is an obvious example of one of these non-profit service projects, as it draws in the foreigner's eye, attention, and money as a

cultural center amid poverty. The setting for these Afrofuturist works is extremely realistic as they are situated in the areas of mass displacement, a segregation movement from apartheid in South Africa.

The area in which speculation comes into play at the Guga S'Thebe Theater is the impermanence of the township in general, the historical roots of the township in contrast to what the theater is doing for the community today, and the goals of the theater being that of a future-oriented mindset. The goal for this theater and for the civic building in general is to give a new future to those in the township. Writer Iain Low writes the following:

> One of the lesser documented architectural characteristics of the post-apartheid period is the production of innovative alternatives to the limitations of the government's appropriation of those utilitarian apartheid NBRI housing units (2018).

This theater exists as an innovative alternative to the reality imposed by the post-apartheid governmental structure. While most of it is based in reality, the speculation of a life beyond what has been given to the people of the township allows the Guga S'Thebe theater to inch toward speculation in its architectural projection of the future.
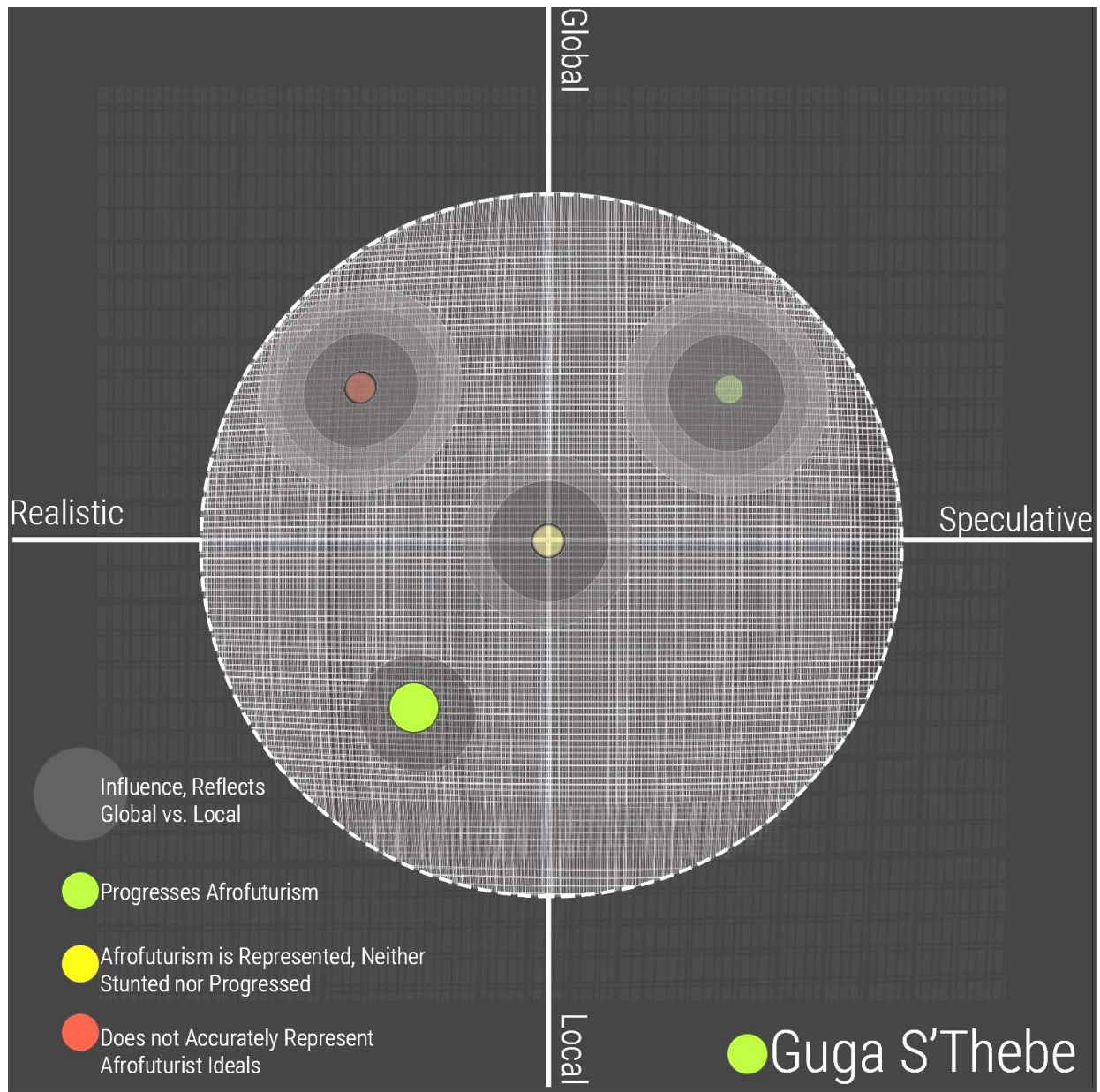
For the advancement of Afrofuturism in local areas, especially in Cape Town, South Africa, the potential is exciting but has yet to be truly identified and analyzed. With small-scale Afrofuturist works like the buildings in the Gugu S'Thebe complex, the perspective of the future is shifting towards more an equitable and just future. But with a lack of obvious, purposeful Afrofuturist architectural work (apart from the successful Guga S'Thebe) it is very difficult for the local people to experience a space that promotes a new future. In addition, there seems to be

a lack of local, speculative Afrofuturist architectural works. I find it hard to believe that these do not exist, whether they exist in art or spoken stories about architectural space or children's drawings of their dream homes. But there is a lack of published research about the local-speculative. Afrofuturist propagators should feel implored to focus on this region of the axes.

Shanty Mega-Structures by Olalekan Jeyifous

Jeyifous, Olalekan. *Shanty Mega-Structures.* (2015).

Olalekan Jeyifous, the artist behind the series titled *Shanty Mega-Structures* uses Afrofuturist

architectural representation as a commentary on the future of African urban centers and

townships (Souppouris 2019, 1). His goal with these rendered, imaginative housing structures is

to "juxtapose sites of privileged and much coveted real-estate throughout Lagos with colossal

vertical settlements representing marginalized and impoverished communities" (Souppouris

2019, 1). The Afrofuturist aspect of this work deals with critiquing the present by using

Afrofuturism to suggest what today could birth for Africa's urban future—what the possibilities

of the future could be, with a negative connotation. A mix of technological and architectural

innovation confined within the township setting makes this project a unique Afrofuturist work; a traveling series that has the power to influence global and local audiences alike.

As an art series that makes its way into multiple museums and galleries across the globe, as well as having a strong presence on the internet, there is a strong pull for this artwork to be considered a more global work in respect to my analytical framework. Kai Cheang, who interviewed Jeyifous, writes, "Part of the global, metropolitan appeal of his work is its imagination of a future where technology, urbanism, and capitalism are taken to their technologized, highly segregated extremes" (2016, 419). Jeyifous' work is exposed to different countries and different cultures, but his work also has a localized niche, as the setting of his work (mostly situated in Lagos), is particular to his architectural commentary. Jeyfious writes about Lagos saying, "It is one of the fastest growing mega cities, and an enormously fascinating and fertile ground for architects, urban planners and anyone else intrigued by its potential" (Gbadamosi 2016). This potential is not limited to Lagos or Jeyifous' specificity in setting or place, as the work has influenced the perceptions of urban Africa across the world. This is a unique case of Afrofuturist architecture, as it has a malleable influence on such a wide range of geographic scales.

Regarding the speculative vs. realistic realm of this work, Cheang writes, "Indeed, the future that Jeyifous imagines blurs (science fiction) and reality, since the conditions that allow for such futuristic moments to take place are within reach" (2016, 419). While there is a basis of reality (construction materials, cultural references, setting, and other tangible architectural norms) that contribute to this project's realistic aspects, there also exists a speculative, Afrofuturist aspect to Jeyifous's work. He comments on his artistry stating the following:

> I definitely see my work as both a combination of practical and speculative design strategies. This is an adherence to my background in architecture and its confrontation with my current trajectory as an artist; my work is an attempt to create art that challenges or critiques ideas rooted in contemporary cultural and geopolitical narratives. However, I am not trying to produce architectural solutions for them. So, while the work may be "futuristic" and speculative, it is very much grounded in dialogue from history as well as the present. (Cheang 2016, 421).

The vertex of the realistic and speculative aspects of Jeyifous' work can sometimes be misconstrued to be more reality-based as opposed to a speculative commentary using realistic elements and recognizable scenes. Jeyifous writes, "People will occasionally be inclined to confuse architecturally inspired artworks that make a social or political commentary with real-life, solutions-based design projects" (Gbadamosi 2016, 1). While the intent of the critique behind the work might not necessarily translate to the viewer, still the aspects of reality and speculation make an impact in the viewer's vision of what the future could possibly be, achieving the change in perspective that Afrofuturism as a movement seeks to provide. Jeyifous answers the question regarding his Afrofuturist work, "Can it only ever be a provocation, or might real worlds come out of it?" by simply explaining, "The worlds I create are not always solutions" (Heathcote 2019, 1). The crossroads of the realistic realm with the futuristic realm manifest in architectural representations in Jeyifous work; a unique architectural, Afrofuturist projection.
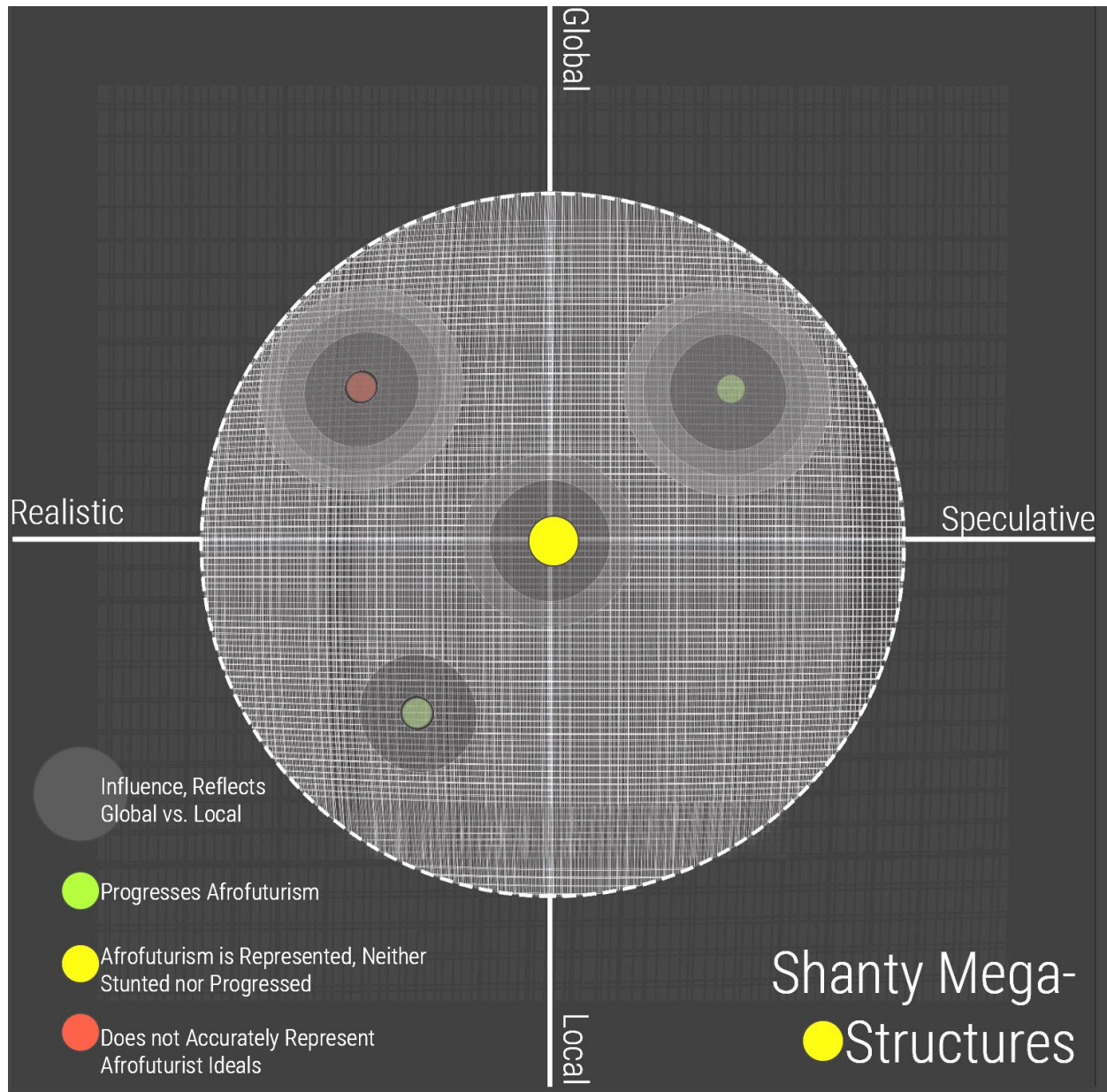
The *Shanty Mega-Structures* project is a unique Afrofuturist case in which it exists in the center of both axes. The malleable aspects of this kind of work allows the artist's commentary to be manipulated based on his goals. The power of Afrofuturist architectural representation specific to this type of work lies within its inherent ability as a two-dimensional, internet-accessible, representation of the possibilities of the future. Its realism allows the viewer to relate to the work and recognize layman elements of architecture and the African urban setting. The

element of realism allows the viewer to see a contrasting norm with the futurist, speculative aspect of the represented environment. This work's non-conformity to either pole gives it the unique opportunity to speak to both the realistic and the futuristic, a symbiosis that viewers on both the local and global scale can relate to.

With this project specifically, Jeyifous critiques the present by suggesting a lens of Afrofuturism that is not necessarily positive. Jeyifous comments on this aspect of his work saying, "It's a visual conversation on how slums are frequently viewed as unsightly eyesores to be bull-dozed, leaving their inhabitants completely displaced" (Souppouris 2019, 1). By juxtaposing the tall, intricate, futuristic quality of his projected improvised housing with the impoverished vernacular materials of the slums, Jeyifous gives a unique vision of Afrofuturism to art viewers both in contained, local art galleries and on websites and other art shows across the world. He sums up the goals of Afrofuturism as it relates to his work saying, "I wanted to create something interesting that provides an alternative vision of the future" (Gbadamosi 2016, 1). This interesting, alternative vision of the future has the potential to change audience perspectives of Lagos, Nigeria, and African ideals in general, but it does not exclusively positively progress the goals of Afrofuturism as the architecture of Wakanda and the Guga S'Thebe complex do.

Discussion

Analyzing works based on the speculative vs. realistic axis and the global vs. local axes furthers the discourse, codifying architectural works as they relate to Afrofuturism. This discussion on a case-by-case basis is extremely significant in the studies of both Afrofuturism and architecture, as this analysis is a new way to survey an individual structure's influence as well as the media-labeled "Afrofuturist" architecture. Placing architectural Afrofuturist works in the grid of the perpendicular axes is a visual way which allows me to critically analyze media-labeled "Afrofuturist" architectural works as a whole, and by using the four case studies above, I can draw conclusions based on this small but significant pool of data. In addition to the above analyses of the specific works and their involvement (or lack of involvement) in progressing the goals of Afrofuturism, this encompasses the critical, analytical contribution to this thesis.
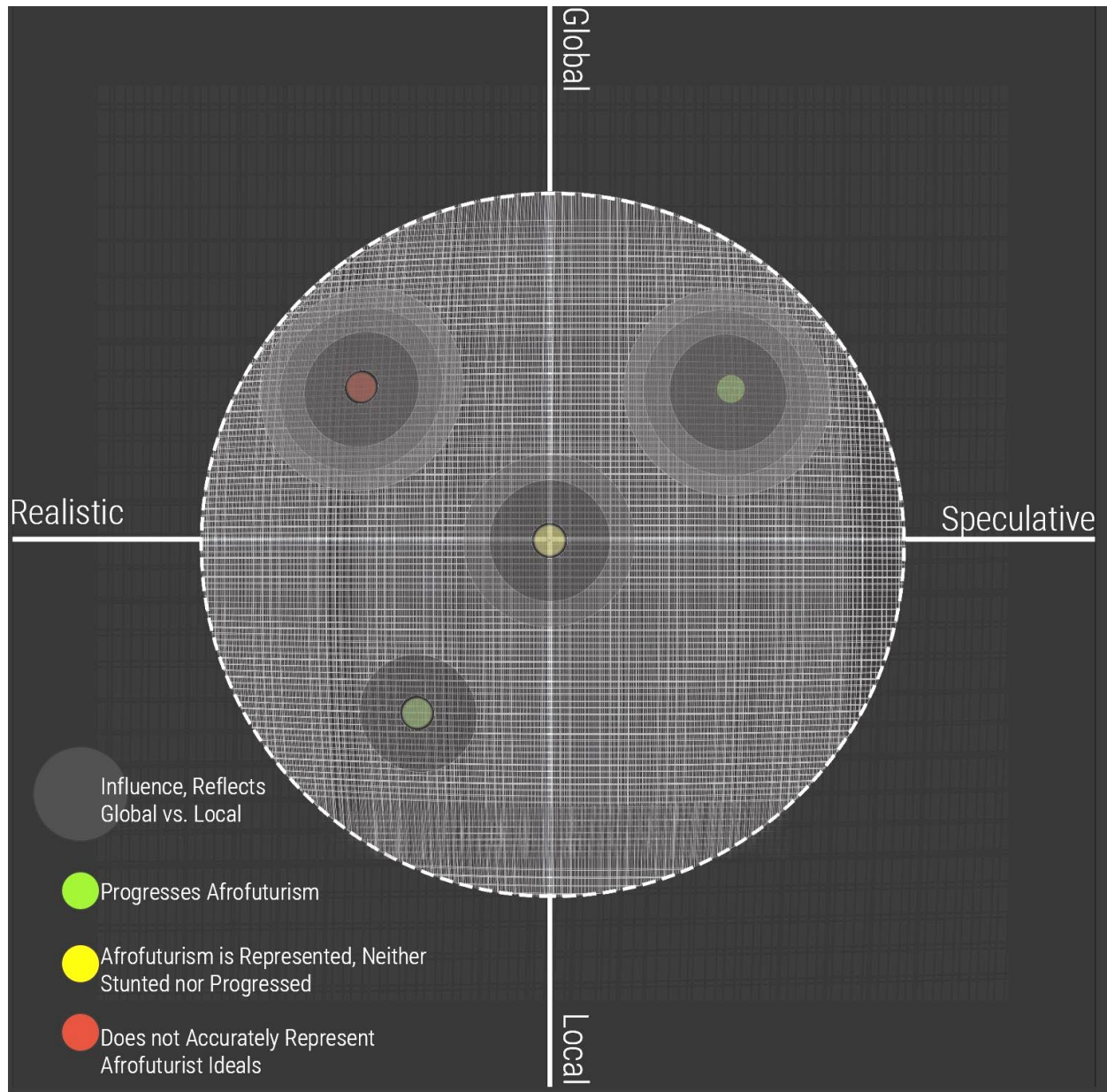
The promise of the global-speculative is tangible in the case study that is *Black Panther*'s influence, and therefore Wakanda's architectural influence. It reaches far and wide, is non-discriminatory regarding its audience, and holds fast the promise to change the world's view of the African future and the global future. In fact, the promise of the global-speculative goes as far as suggesting that the idealized, equitable African future could be imagined as the actualized global future. A non-reality based, apotheosized future setting of architectural implementation

has the power to change the rigid, racist ideologies that many, if not all, areas of the world possess. It is through the broad influence of the global-speculative that the world's inherent racism and bias can be addressed. The world today, as a result of media bias and inherent bias, has a negative view of Africans and Black communities in the African diaspora. The global-speculative could speak to those people, as its influence reaches far and wide, for the progression of Afrofuturism. This could change the global perspective of the future in a creative, imaginative way.

The problem of the global-realistic, specifically in the case of the Zeitz MOCAA but probably applicable to other case studies, is that physical, financial, and systematic reality holds constraints on the Afrofuturist architectural movement. Whether a building is using and abusing the term "Afrofuturism" in order to gain media attention, or is not upholding its promises to be truly Afrofuturist in its operations/programming, the fact that this type of work actually exists in the built environment means that it is actually affecting people's day to day lives. The realistic end of the spectrum must be held responsible for how the building's programming affects the communities that Afrofuturism is progressing. If it falls short, as the Zeitz MOCAA does, there are significant implications for the communities that are let down as a result of the term "Afrofuturism" being used nominally but neglected in practice.

The global narrative is one that Afrofuturism can speak to in order to change subconscious racism and inequality as it relates to social justice narratives. However, a global-realistic Afrofuturist building must also support the progression of a more equally represented future for the local Africans and global Black communities in its programming. To exist only as a spectacle for foreigners who have the monetary means of interacting with an "Afrofuturist" structure misses the entire goals of Afrofuturism. The critique of the global-realistic will

continue to be an essential one, as the global narrative towards the portrayed future has the potential to revert to a bias, skewed, racist, unequal, detrimental future, unless the global-realistic power is utilized through architectural (and other mediums') means.

The paradigm shift of the local-realistic happens when the future-focused programming of a realistic structure empowers the local users and surrounding community. Architecture has the power to be used as a space that shifts the future fates of its users by empowering the users in real-time. The Guga S'Thebe Children's Theater, as a part of the Arts and Cultural Center, answers strongly to what Afrofuturism's ideals are; they strengthen the local African cultural identity. Afrocentric ideals are present in its programming and educational events, and the narrative of the future for the local people in Langa township by empowering the users to create change in their lives. Afrofuturist buildings that exist in the local-realistic realm do not get much media attention but can have a huge impact on those who need the progression of Afrofuturism to make tangible changes for their futures. Empowering local Africans and global Black communities can be fulfilled architecturally through space dedicated for the futures of Africans and people of global Black communities.

Architectural projections that exist in the middle of the global/local and the realistic/speculative are incredibly pliable in their makeup, their mediums, their location, and their influence. Speaking directly to the influence of these works, they can exist both physically, such as in an art installation, or online, where global accessibility weighs heavily on its Afrofuturist influence. Whether centered around Afrofuturist commentary/critique, such as the *Shanty Mega Structures* project, or centered around speculative but possible future imageries, the malleability of these types of projects allows room for exploration and innovation in this realm.

There are currently no media-labeled "Afrofuturist" local-speculative works in the field of architecture that have been researched. However, addressed in other precedent research that this thesis does not formally highlight, local, speculative stories and tales, cultural songs, art works, fashion, economic implementations, and so many other media that strongly shows the positive, progressive effects of Afrofuturist motives. This may lead one to believe that local-speculative architecture does exist but is not necessarily readily accessible to research. This could be an aspiration of further research of this thesis and could truly change the conversation surrounding Afrofuturist architecture and its local power.

Positionality & Next Steps

As the researcher and author of this thesis, I believe that my positionality was a huge limitation to this study as I am coming from a privileged, white, upper class, American society, and cannot empathize with the people Afrofuturism is championing. I have taken all precautions to identify my own perceptions of the world that could infiltrate this research, and I have readily shed them, as best as I was able, of affecting my arguments and critiques in this research. However, I do not identify as a minority, no less an African American minority, so the stakes for me and the reality of Afrofuturism are far less significant than my African and Pan-African brothers and sisters. I have benefitted, whether directly or indirectly, from the way the world has worshiped the Eurocentric future, suppressing Black futures, along with other minorities' futures. I am angry and ashamed. But I believe in the power of Afrofuturism to change the global perspective of the future. I believe in the power of Afrofuturism to change individual lives and perspectives of the future. I believe that anyone can participate in this movement. I see a future of architecture, art, music, and film — media of all kinds — that represent all walks of life and promote the narrative of inclusivity and future progression for all people.

If I were to continue this research, I would focus heavily on more geographic and cultural regions both in and outside of Africa. Analyzing a broader geographic scale, I would be able to survey how the world uses architecture as a means of hindering or progressing Afrofuturism. Therefore, with more data, I could identify the areas of the world that are truly tapping into architecture's power in this movement. I could also focus more on contextual histories with how global cultures are interacting with the Afrofuturist movements. I would focus on European, North American, and South American local and global movements, and compare them to Northern African, Sub-Saharan African, and more localized African movements. The histories of

Africans and those who partake in African cultures in small-scale geographic locations play an extremely significant role in how Afrofuturism should be employed, so I would be interested in focusing future research on the history of African futuristic movements in these localized regions as well.

My goal through this research is to show that there is power in Afrofuturism both on a local and global scale, rooted in the realistic realm and the speculative realm. All combinations of these factors have validity and influence in the Afrofuturist movement. In my analysis I discuss the importance of the different scales of influence. The future of Afrofuturist architectural critique could encompass more than just analysis on the two spectra I identified. Hopefully, architectural Afrofuturism will become more recognized, utilized, and researched in the future.

Conclusion

Afrofuturism is seen in the field of architecture, whether realistically or speculatively, and its individual works can be analyzed for the purpose of critical review. In this thesis, I developed a framework for analyzing Afrofuturist architecture and used a comparative case study method to analyze and critique "Afrofuturist" architectural works.

The critique of these media-labeled "Afrofuturist" projects is imperative to architectural and Afrofuturist discourse. Birthed from the critiques above, I have identified the following three necessities when analyzing the effectiveness of an Afrofuturist architectural work:

1. The work must empower Africans and/or those in the African Diaspora by strengthening a cultural identity.

2. Afrocentric ideals must be somehow present in the structure, in its visual projection, or in its programming/operations.

3. The narratives of the past, present, and/or future must be reconfigured to support Afrofuturist endeavors.

These necessities would not have otherwise been identified without the creation of the analytical framework and the critiques of the case studies that followed. Architects, designers, artists, cultural commentators, and Afrofuturists alike can use the analytical framework, the method of critique, and the conclusion of the above necessities when discussing Afrofuturist architecture.

Using the analytical framework, placing case studies on my analytical framework grid, and generating an overall survey of Afrofuturist architecture, I discovered that some areas of the codified architecture are hurting the vision of Afrofuturist ideals as opposed to championing them. Others, like the local-speculative works, are completely lacking in any media-covered,

easily accessible, researchable works. If future research ensues in this area of Afrofuturist research, local-speculative works might be named as potentially the most powerful, emergent quadrant of Afrofuturist architecture according to my analytical framework. If I were to continue this research, speaking to the gap of speculative, local works, I would like to research the ways in which architectural ideas manifest in story telling or other types of imagery not associated with two dimensional or three dimensional architecture. There might be a whole gold mine of powerful Afrofuturist progression to be found in this area of study.

There is power in Afrofuturism. Architecture is a medium that either hinders the goals of Afrofuturism or champions them. The scholarly critique on the media-labeled "Afrofuturist" buildings is essential for the field of architecture and the field of Afrofuturist studies. I hope the power in this research realized and capitalized, as the future changes to be one that represents all equally. Afrofuturism is a fight to reclaim the future of the Earth. A complex narrative that could become reality; even in 3-D architectural space. The fight for the future has power now.

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