The Design Student as Storyteller: An Afro-Futuristic Perspective of Storytelling

ANNICIA STREETE
Louisiana State University
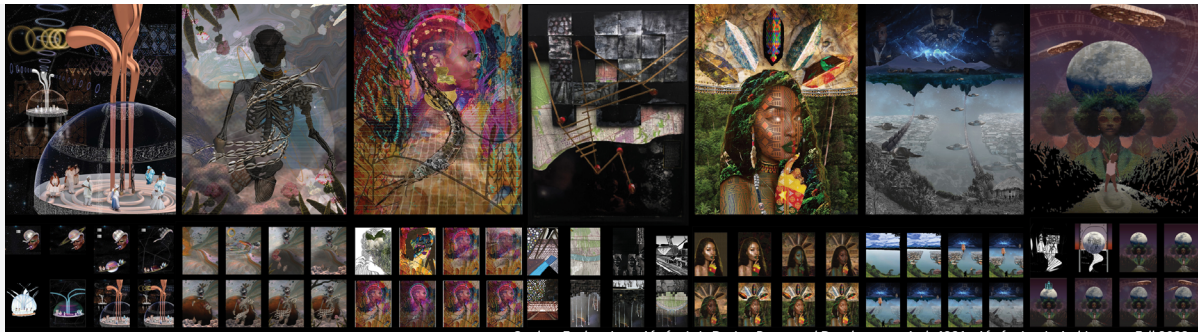
Keywords: design student, storyteller, afrofuturism

ABSTRACT

A futuristic perspective of "storytelling" as an educating design tool in an architecture elective course that explores Afrofuturism within Architecture. Afrofuturism offers a critical approach to thinking about future built environments of African and African Diasporic communities throughout the world. The course is rooted in a method that introduces Afrofuturism, a school of thought addressing intersections of afro-culture, the use of science and technology to project futures of liberation and innovation, using imagination.[1] A study of Ten Principles of Black Space Design, authored by American Architect Jack Travis, FAIA, NOMAC, accompanies the introduction as a way to understand governing infrastructural, cultural, and environmental design factors existing within African and African Diasporic communities.[2] This pedagogical approach offers an opportunity to expose the design student to a global citizen group that has faced environmental design inequities and to engage the student in embracing storytelling as a conduit of change through design. They become the "storytellers" or "griots" — synonymous with the passing of knowledge within African and African Diasporic communities. The term Afrofuturism was coined by author and cultural critic Mark Dery in 1993 but evident in the work and black cultural traditions of artists such as Sun Ra and George Clinton in the early 1970's. Today, narratives of Afrofuturism are represented in film such as The Black Panther, 2018.[3] Further explorations are presented by scholar Alondra Nelson, Octavia Butler — black science fiction writer and Nalo Hopkins — Jamaican fiction writer who weaves futuristic narratives with Caribbean historic and cultural practices.

ENDNOTES

1. Ytasha Womack, Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture, (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013), 1-22

2. "Jack Travis, FAIA, On Black Identity," https://info.aia.org/aiarchitect/ thisweek07/1102/1102rc_face.htm, 1-3.

3. "Afrofuturism is creating a different narrative for Africa says creatives," https:// www.dezeen.com/2018/04/06/afrofuturism-different-narrative-architecture-design-fashion-africa/, 1-7.

Student Explorations: Afrofutristic Design Poster and Development, Arch 4221 - Afrofutrism in Architecture, Fall 2022

AFROFUTURISM *in architecture*

"Afrofuturism", a school of thought addressing intersections of afro-culture; using: **technology and imagination** to **project futures** of **liberation and innovation**.

The term Afrofuturism was coined by **author and cultural critic Mark Dery** in **1993** but evident in black cultural traditions and in the work of artists such as **Sun Ra** and **George Clinton** in the **early 1970's**.

Art curator and **Afrofuturist Ingrid La Fleur** defines it as, "a way of imagining possible futures through **a black cultural lens**, a way to: **encourage experimentation**, **reimagine identities**, and **activate liberation**."

Methodology A critical step in exploring afrofuturism was first discovering its origins, exploring how it is represented in "black enviroments" today and studying principles that guide our understanding in these spaces *(principles and phases below).*

10 Principles of Black Space Design, authored by educator and architect **Jack Travis**.

1. Economy   **INFRASTRUCTRE**
2. Simplicity
3. Ease of Construction
4. Ease of Maintenance

5. Spirituality   **CULTURE**
6. Heritage
7. Duality/ Irony of the Condition

                    ENVIRONMENTAL
8. Earth Centered   **DESIGN**
9. Strong/Indoor Outdoor Relationship
10. Intense Use of Color, Pattern, and Texture

Afrofuturistic Narratives

Film , Wakanda , Black Panther Set, 2018, Hannah Beachler, production designer.

Visual Art, Wakanda's Afro-Futuristic "Masterplan": An Ecosystem of Flexible BIM Structures for Urban Nomads, Matri-Archi(tecture) 2019.

Fashion, Surrealist and Sci-fi inluenced streetwear, traditional prints, contemporary, Selly Raby Ka, fashion designer.

Storytelling as design tool

"An imaginative take of the Treme neighborhood in New Orleans 6th Ward in the future, along the Zulu Mardi Gras Route on S. Clairborne and Jackson Ave. The second line evolves into contemporary dancers who are a part of the Mardi Gras Indians and Zulu which acts as a means of cultural preservation and celebration for generations in the city" - *Student CK, Arch 4221, Fall 2021.*

"An African American figure who utilizes the "afrofuturistic design lens" to envision the perfect future. African patterns connect the present and the future. A joint between these two times" - *Student TP, Arch 4221, Fall 2021.*

"Afrofuturist space travel to Mars and how rich its culture could be. The civilization consists of a domed village that has both traditional, African huts as well as futurist urban huts. Music artist Janelle Monae hosts a concert from her UFO above. Both village buildings and concert express a duality between past, present, and future African culture" - *Student MD, Arch 4221, Fall 2021.*

I DISCOURSE

ACTIVITY • • • • •
TOPIC • • • • • •
FOCUS • • • • • •

Activity: Introduction
Topic: Exploring Afrofuturism
Focus: Disciplines within which afrofutrism has been strongly represented and codified.

Origins - Black Arts Movement, 1960s - 1970s (black consiousness, civil rights movement, the african diaspora)

Contemporary - Science-Fiction, Art, Comics, Music, Dance, Film, Poetry, Fashion, Culinary Arts.

The exploration within Architecutre is briefly introduced in this phase. It's main facilitation occurs in phase II, considering the tenets of Afrofuturism and the 10 principles of black space design to focus the study.

II DIALOGUE

ACTIVITY • • • • • •
TOPIC • • • • • •
FOCUS • • • • • •

Activity: Discussion Presentations
Topic: A Selected Case Study
Focus: The Principles of Black Space Design addressing **INFRASTRUCTURE**.

Activity: Discussion Presentations
Topic: A Selected Project, Black Architect and their Practice
Focus: The Principles of Black Space Design addressing **CULTURE**.

Activity: Discussion Presentations
Topic: Design in Africa and the African Diaspora - The Caribbean and The United States of America
Focus: The Principles of Black Space Design addressing **ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN**.

III DESIGN

ACTIVITY • • • • •
TOPIC • • • • • •
FOCUS • • • • •

Activity: Poster Design
Topic: Afrofutristic Explorations in Architecture
Focus: An Outward Expression of the explored, studied and internalized **tenets of Afrofuturism and Jack Travis' 10 Principles of Black Space Design**.

An afrofuturistic representation of a chosen "black space". The poster space as an "imagined site" of a constructred narrative.

What story would be told?

IV EXHIBITION

ACTIVITY • • • •
TOPIC • • • • •
FOCUS • • • • •

Activity: Design Exhibition
Topic: Afrofutristic Explorations in Architecture
Focus: Student Narratives

The students present their poster design in an exhibition. Invited guests from within and outside the design disciplines, as well as the local community are given the opportunity to view and dialogue with the students on their design narratives.

POSTER

Figure 1. The Design Student as Storyteller: An Afrofuturistic Perspective of Storytelling. (Author: Streete)