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Nostalgic dystopia in Neill Blomkamp's District 9

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Propositions

1. Johannesburg as a city has not previously been interpreted by scholars as having a distinctive appearance in popular media.
2. During the post-apartheid period between 1994 and 2018 Johannesburg is consistently depicted—in local and international popular media, photography and film—as dystopian.
3. The aesthetic category of the sublime has not been referred to in research interrogating the representation of the city, however as a category bringing together repulsion and attraction, it offers a useful framework for analysing dystopian depictions of Johannesburg.
4. The film *District 9* (2009), made by South-African-born Neill Blomkamp, represents the landscape of Johannesburg as dystopian, and also with distinctly nostalgic qualities.
5. In retrospect the work of documentary photographers such as David Goldblatt and Santu Mofokeng can be seen as contributing to the idiom of nostalgic dystopia in their representations of Johannesburg.
6. The mimicking of 1980s newsreels, film from that decade, and analogue photography creates so-called ‘analogue nostalgia’ in *District 9*.
7. The post-colonial sublime is a useful reframing of the aesthetic category of the sublime, particularly in allowing for an interrogation of post-industrial urban landscapes.
8. ‘Ruin porn’ (aestheticizing decay, poverty and suffering in photography and film) is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary popular culture.
9. Although Johannesburg has a large amount of Jacaranda trees, it is still colloquially known as the ‘City of Gold’ (in isiZulu, *Egoli*), rather than the ‘City of Jacarandas’, after the fragrant blossoms of these trees, which is—quite unfairly, I propose—a designation reserved for the City of Tshwane instead.