

## Ciudades sin lugar. Utopías urbanas en la ciencia ficción \*

(\*) MUÑUMER, Carmen. Editorial EDICIONES ASIMÉTRICAS, Madrid, 2023, 180 pages. ISBN: 9788419050670

Throughout history, utopias have been envisioned as proposals for a new model of society, often articulated around an architectural idea. Carmen Muñumer points out that imagining this city means questioning the future by starting from an analysis of the present. Beyond a formal appearance, it involves the "desire to improve the relationship with its inhabited environment." Based on this idea of utopia and its translations into architecture, the author explores the relationship between modern architecture and science fiction cinema as the perfect symbiosis to reflect on the city of the future. Through the materialization of a series of architectural ideas brought to life on screen, it becomes possible to envision a new society while, in many cases unconsciously, exposing concerns about the present. The evolving relationship between imagined architectures and existing cities reveals societies' changing attitudes toward the future and the potential of architecture as a driving force for change.

"The predictions of science fiction are regularly surpassed by events, but the important thing is not their accuracy but the extrapolative process that produced them." This quote by Phil Hardy can summarize the central thesis of *Cities Without Place: Urban Utopias in Science Fiction* (*Ciudades sin lugar. Utopías urbanas en la ciencia ficción*), in which the author, a specialist in the History and Aesthetics of Cinematography, explores the relationship established throughout the 20th century between science fiction cinema and architecture, two disciplines that have mutually influenced each other since the early days of the seventh art. The design of spaces shown in films is connected to the filmmakers' interaction with the art of their time and their connection to avant-garde artistic movements. Initially, the cinematic medium was understood as an appropriate vehicle for conveying architectural avant-garde ideas, originating from the prestigious position of other artistic disciplines compared to this new form of expression. The genre allows for an exploration of how a society views its future, and the constructed environment where the stories unfold serves as a significant indicator of perceptions of human relationships, including aspects such as politics, economics, and power dynamics.

Soon, however, the tables turned, and cinema began to gain preeminence over other arts due to its popularity, enabling a rich exchange. Initially, architectural ideas that were never intended to be constructed—reflecting an idealized vision of society—became the settings for films, offering a way to test their viability. Over time, these settings started to become the real spaces where the lives of audiences played out, and the optimism toward modern architecture as a transformer of society began to decline. Realized architectural works thus became the backdrop for pessimistic visions of the future, ceasing to serve as tools to improve the living conditions of their inhabitants.

### FIGURE 01 »

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MUÑUMER, Carmen.



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. Between *\*Metropolis\** and *\*Blade Runner\**, the author explores some of the most significant science fiction films, showcasing their shifts in ambition, quality, and imaginative capacity. At the same time, she points out the concerns of the societies that produced these films and how their fears or visions of the future are translated into cinema. Muñumer notes that the greater the gap between reality and the space depicted on screen, the more avant-garde and utopian the architectural proposal becomes.

During a period when modern art and architectural movements were flourishing, Fritz Lang's *\*Metropolis\** absorbed a vast array of avant-garde influences, synthesizing them into an urban and social model that was far removed from the realities of the early 20th century. *\*Metropolis\** thus becomes a foundational work for analyzing the gap between the architecture represented in the film and that of the time it was made, exerting significant influence on subsequent productions.

At the other end of the spectrum lies *\*Blade Runner\**, with its "vision of an increasingly less perfect future." This film, another cornerstone of architectural analysis, is noted by Muñumer for its ability to design a world brimming with historical references, enabling its portrayal of Los Angeles in 2019 to become "all places, in all times, simultaneously."

The structure of the book allows the author to effectively develop and argue her theory about the depiction of utopias in science fiction cinema and the potential of modern architecture to transform the city. While the text's brevity may leave some analyses lightly sketched, its conciseness is one of its strengths. It is noteworthy that the relationships between cinema and architecture are tied together by the representation of architecture in films. There has been a mutual transfer between the two disciplines, which was more symbiotic in their early stages, as the visibility provided by cinema validated architectural proposals, while science fiction films gained prestige through their connection to avant-garde movements. However, this symbiosis has diminished over time.

Another intriguing connection between cinema and architecture is based on the use of editing as a tool for spatial manipulation. Muñumer recalls the exchanges between Sergei Eisenstein and Le Corbusier through this mechanism, which enabled one of the clearest transfers between the two art forms. This exchange moved away from formal imitation and instead focused on the generation of spaces and the use of time as an architectural phenomenon.

In her conclusions, Muñumer is more optimistic about architecture's capacity to develop life-enhancing environments. Drawing on Heidegger's assertion that humanity will "reach the essence of dwelling when it builds from dwelling and thinks for dwelling," and reclaiming, via Lefebvre, the value of utopia as a vehicle for imagining the future from the real, she places her hope in the symbiosis between cinema and architecture to envision a possible ideal city.