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Glossy Urban Dystopias

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EDITORIAL



This special issue has called for collecting reflections and critical discussion about glossy urban dystopias, which is proposed as a lens to understand urban transformations built via alluring, enticing renders and images, to face – or better hide – problems and conflicts in contemporary city.

Narratives of urban decline, or simply the everyday urban complexity stated as problem, are often contrasted by narratives and representations of regeneration and rebranding of the city and problematic neighbourhoods. The hypothesis the issue aims to explore is that the urban dystopias radiate ‘happiness’ rather than fear, contrary to the post-apocalyptic dystopic futures forecasted by classic science fictions or any apocalyptic scenarios. Understanding and discussing – as well unmaking – such ‘happiness’ is crucial to bring out the most controversial features of urban imaginaries and policies promising it.

These ‘glossy attractive urban dystopias’ do not warn about the dangers that their given underlain socio-political trajectory might entail, as the exclusion and inequalities that they can drive. Rather they pacify any doubts and fears by providing a ‘picture perfect future’ which becomes imprinted into social imaginaries with a positive association, albeit with no questions asked.

According to what we more extensively argued in the last paper – *Through the Lens of Glossy Urban Dystopias* – this lens is both interpretive and methodological and allows us to understand critical issues, as the rising tendencies of governments and institutions to face potential future urban emergencies or problems by means of regeneration projects to justify further securitization, pacification coercive governmentalities and injustices.

Somehow, the topics of this issue reify processes that substantiate (also) the rhetoric of glossy

urban dystopias, and they somehow update the open reflections that the Io Squaderno hosted in 2012 (S.I. *Urban Rhetorics*), critically analysing the discursive dimension of the imaginary that such rhetoric nurtures.

Vicente Brêtas’ paper – *Resuscitating Downtown? Rhetorical Strategies and Racial Exclusion in Rio de Janeiro’s Central Area* – focuses on the Reviver Centro program, critically discussing its idealized images of lively streets in mixed revitalized central neighbourhoods against the dystopian concrete reality facing old time city-center dwellers, as they were new utopias of downtown life. While planners resort glossy concepts – as walkability, sustainability or inclusivity – they dissolve any political connotations behind them, and they promote a politically void notions of urban life, where a racialized dispossession and ontological erasure in central Rio de Janeiro is de facto provoked.

Francesco Amoruso’s *Dystopian Present-Futures: On the Unmaking and Making of Urban Palestine* is unavoidably challenged and updated (as well suspended) by the current situation in the Gaza Strip. The paper points out how the new Palestinian city of Rawabi in the West Bank shows the intersection of ‘glossy’ urban representations with the geographies and political economies of Israeli settler colonialism. Rawabi’s developers promise a bright urban future of economic prosperity planned urban development despite the ongoing Israeli military occupation, while the paper shows Rawabi framed as a capitalist land grabbing project which allows a small class of Palestinian capitalists to benefit from the Israeli colonialism and promotes pacification and de-politicisation among the city’s middle-class residents.

Eleonora Nicoletti’s *Dystopian Transition?* discusses how tackling the climate crisis has prompted urban regeneration initiatives for the renewable energy transition which can offer

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a dystopi future. The paper explores how energy-focused renovations can negatively affect the sense of place, harming vulnerable population segments and exacerbating social inequality, pointing out the energy transition as an 'eco-dystopia', or a technocratic urban dystopia.

Opening another reflection path, the paper by Ifigeneia Dimitrakou & Julie Ren – *Boring Dystopias in Fictional Geographies: Affective Atmospheres of Enclosure* — investigates the relationship between spatial enclosure and dystopic everyday lives in fictional film. The focus is the representation of violent social and spatial enclosures, as well as the attempts to escape them, in the film *Parasite* (2019). The authors frame these experiences as boring dystopias, i.e., as dystopias in which horrible realities have been normalized as a part of everyday life. Beyond its spatial and material conditions, the paper also explores the affective atmospheres of enclosure, which render the hidden violence of enclosure tangible.

Luis Martin Sanchez's *Metaverse Cities. Deconstructing a Glossy Urban Dystopia* focuses on some attempts to construct virtual cities, affective utopias or dystopias in an embodied internet, which seems like the ultimate expression of the neoliberal model applied to the urban project, even if virtual. The paper presents some virtual cities as they seem to re-propose consolidated physical cities urban issues and well-rooted techno-capitalistic imaginaries and features of the contemporary neoliberal-model city, raising unavoidable crucial questions for architects and urban planners working in the not-virtual city.

Scott W. Schwartz's *Decolonize this Dystopia! Wealth Pollution on the Hudson River* analyses the luxury developments of Manhattan's Hudson River through the concept "wealth pollution". As the author stated, within this conceit, the ultra-wealthy are the rubbish bins of society,

receptacles of capitalism's unnecessary wealth, however they emerge as necessary to capitalism's reproduction. Beyond the case study, actually the paper let emerge and argues how these megaprojects foreclose the ability to consider a future outside the perpetual growth of colonial-capitalism itself.

The visual contribute is *Land Narrative | Fantastic Future*, a project for the 18th International Architecture Exhibition La Biennale di Venezia 2023 by urbanAC (Toni L. Griffin, Danny Clarke, Rashad Dorsey, Gabriel Soomar), a planning and design management practice based in New York. The work powerfully subverts any dystopia of everyday life in 'Black Belt' neighbourhoods of Chicago's South Side.

P.K. and C.M.

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic sparked a wide array of calls for rethinking the city itself, and urban planning has been brought to the fore of discussions as a key tool for promoting a sustainable, resilient recovery. Central urban areas are an integral part of this debate: traditionally characterized by business and retail, these areas have been heavily hit by the crisis, with remote work and online shopping contributing to worldwide surges in office-space vacancy rates. This has triggered a new wave of city-center revitalization projects with the underlying goal of increasing residential density, mainly through the repurposing of empty and underutilized office buildings into mixed-use developments.¹

In the city of Rio de Janeiro, the Reviver Centro Program constitutes the local government's response to this encompassing trend. While Downtown Rio has been facing a steady residential decrease since the mid-1980s, its position as the city's main business and retail hub allowed it to maintain a fair degree of dynamism.² The pandemic, however, shifted this balance: enacted in 2021, when the vacancy rate of commercial real-estate in the city center reached a record high of around 45%³, Reviver Centro's main goal is to attract residents as a means of breathing new life into the city's traditional economic node. By promoting the creation of a mixed-use neighborhood in the heartland of the city, the program caters to a mostly young, white and upper-middle class demographic seeking to live closer to the bustling cultural life of Downtown Rio. Other than that, it also comprises a series of additional interlinked priorities, such as the revitalisation of public spaces, the promotion of green infrastructure and active mobility, as well as the fostering of creative and cultural entrepreneurship. These efforts are based, as will be further discussed below, on the notion that the current state of the central area has reached a concerning point, marked by empty buildings and streets, which legitimizes calls for market-led revitalisation initiatives.

In order to achieve its main objective, the program operates on both supply and demand: on the supply side, a series of building code relaxations and tax exemptions to developers — many of which have already started to convert old office buildings into mixed-use condos — have already been approved; when it comes to demand, the local government seeks to shift public perceptions and col-

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Since his years as an undergraduate student, he has been deeply interested in the rise of new global frameworks for urban planning and management, particularly in the case of central and downtown areas. His main research topics revolve around the sociospatial and relational dimensions of city-center revitalization projects, as well as urban neoliberalization.

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1 Florida, R. (2022) "Why Downtown won't die". Bloomberg, August 17. Available at: (<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-08-17/as-remote-work-endures-downtowns-are-adapting>).

2 Sant'anna, M. (2007) A cidade-atração: patrimônio e valorização de áreas centrais no Brasil dos anos 90. *Cadernos PPGAUFBA*, 3.

3 Brito, C (2021). "Quase metade dos imóveis comerciais do centro do Rio está vazia, diz Abadi". O Globo, February 11. Available at: (<https://g1.globo.com/rj/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2021/02/11/quase-metade-dos-imoveis-comerciais-do-centro-do-rio-esta-vazia-diz-abadi-especialistas-creem-em-novo-perfil-residencial.ghtml>).

lective representations surrounding the downtown area, with the double objective of making it more appealing to prospective residents and garnering general approval to the project.

At the core of Reviver Centro and similar initiatives taking place in other cities, lies an enticing set of promises, as well as an assemblage of meticulously crafted, spatially-referenced narratives on urban crisis, opportunity and reinvention.⁴ In these narratives, Covid-19 acts as a rhetorical device, with the sense of urgency sparked by the pandemic being capitalized as an strategic opening to enact swift regulatory changes. The current crisis is framed as the point of no return of an enduring process of deterioration facing office-centered downtown areas all over the world. In this sense, there is no going back to the old model: the ideal future city center of the post-pandemic “new normal” is depicted as a mixed-use zone in which business, retail and residential developments can not only coexist but also mutually benefit from one another, leading to a more sustainable and inclusive urban life. These idealized narratives, however, tend to be devoid of any deeper socio political connotations.

Discursive strategies: building an idealized urban future

In the case of Reviver Centro, the discursive strategies employed by government officials and planners revolve around three deeply intertwined notions: together, the concept of the 15-minute city, the idea of sustainability and the defense of market-driven urban development lay the rhetorical foundations of the program, and are essential components of the proposed future of Rio de Janeiro’s downtown.

While not a new concept per-se, the 15-minute city (FMC) gained traction among local decision makers all around the world following the pandemic.⁵ It can be defined as a neighborhood-focused approach to urban planning, based on the idea of geographical proximity and centered around notions of density, architectural diversity, mixed land use and social inclusivity. In the FMC, workplaces, goods, services and a multitude of other urban amenities are accessible to residents within short walks from home, constituting a deep contrast with prevailing modernist planning theories of the XXth Century, which revolved around the spatial separation of urban functions and the continuous progression of sprawl through car-centric mobility.⁶

To local decision makers, the FMC serves as a powerful device in garnering public sympathy for Reviver Centro by pointing both towards an idealized past and an utopic future. There is a tacit consent among many locals that the heyday of Downtown Rio de Janeiro happened between the 1940s and the 1950s, when the city was still the national capital of Brazil and its central area was characterized as a bustling, lively district bolstering many different stores, institutions and economic activities. By resorting to old notions of urban proximity and vitality through the idea of the FMC, the Reviver Centro Program particularly resonates with the idiosyncratic nostalgia felt by many cariocas,⁷ who still resent the loss of national capital status — an event which marked the end of downtown Rio’s “belle-epoque” and is generally regarded as the starting point of a gradual process of urban deterioration; In this sense, the program pledges to rescue this idealized past, leveraging the widespread feeling of nostalgia in order to garner approval to the initiative.

4 Broudehoux, A; Monteiro, J (2017). Reinventing Rio de Janeiro’s old port: territorial stigmatization, symbolic resignification and planned repopulation in Porto Maravilha. *Revista Brasileira de Estudos Urbanos e Regionais*, 19(3), pp. 493-512.

5 Pouzokidou, G; Chatziyiannaki, Z. (2021) 15-minute city: decomposing the new urban planning utopia. *Sustainability*, 13(2).

6 Moreno, C et al. (2021) Introducing the ‘15-minute city’: sustainability, resilience and place identity in future post-pandemic cities. *Smart Cities*, 4(1), pp. 93-111.

7 “Cariocas” is a term applied to the residents and locals of the city of Rio de Janeiro. The word stems from the tupi language, spoken by traditional indigenous groups in Brazil. It can be roughly translated as “white man’s house” (“kara’iwa” = white men; “oka” = house or dwelling).

It simultaneously portrays an imaginary, rather misleading future of lively, walkable and happy streets, in which the local downtown community — mainly made up by the prospective new residents attracted by the transformations promoted through Reviver Centro — is placed front and center of planning decisions and the area is inhabited by an harmonious mix of different social classes and groups. Being widely promoted as an inclusive, democratic urban initiative, the program seeks to incorporate a number of participatory procedures to its institutional design. These, however, seem to constitute yet another rhetorical strategy to leverage approval, since public participation is mostly limited to the definition of the guidelines of conservation and maintenance of local monuments in the central area. In this sense, critical aspects of Reviver Centro, such as those directly pertaining to real-estate development and public housing provision, are not subjected to wider discussions and debates.

The idea of sustainability, which stands as one of the central components of planning discourses in the XXIth Century, is also employed in the context of Reviver Centro. The widely publicized debates on issues such as climate change and greenhouse gas emissions led to a general increase in public awareness, and governments (be they local or national) are known to leverage this awareness. The broad, vaguely-defined idea of sustainability has the power to build consensus around policies framed as ecologically responsible, even when said policies don’t amount to much in terms of measurable effects.⁸ The Reviver Centro program encompasses a number of supposedly sustainable initiatives, and is said to be aligned with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, pointing towards a green and resilient future to downtown Rio de Janeiro. The program’s flagship initiative in this aspect is the creation of a zero-emission district in the heart of the city through the implementation of green infrastructure and the promotion of active mobility. More than two years following Reviver Centro’s approval, however, little to no effort has been directed towards concrete action in this area — a stark contrast with other aspects of the program, particularly those directly pertaining to real-estate development.

It is through the defense of market-driven urban development that the ideological underpinnings of discourses on sustainability and the FMC become fully discernible in the case of Reviver Centro. The local government stresses out its lack of financial and managerial capacity to lead the revitalization of the central area, and therefore the private sector is framed as the main driving force behind the program. Minimizing the risks to private investment and simultaneously expanding profit margins is therefore key. This narrative grants legitimacy to the building code relaxations and tax exemptions enacted through Reviver Centro, ultimately indicating not only that real-estate agents should be prioritized, but also that the success of the project as a whole depends on the profitability of private investments. Essentially, the official discourse indirectly states that if the idealized future of Rio de Janeiro’s downtown is to be reached, it can only be through the establishment of market-friendly, marker-centered approaches.

Private real-estate investment has already begun to flow into the area: as of September 2023, two years after its approval, 32 residential or mixed-use developments were announced in the context of Reviver Centro, most of them being retrofits, 13 of those are already under construction, amounting to almost 2500 new residential units.⁹ Most of the newly announced developments bolster a flashy style, blending the old characteristics of the retrofitted buildings with contemporary trends in architecture in order to garner the attention of prospective buyers. The program is widely regarded as a success, especially considering that in the ten years between 2011 and 2021, only around 1400

8 Pacione, M. (2007) Sustainable urban development in the UK: rhetoric or reality?. *Geography*, 92(3), Pp. 248-265.

9 Secretaria Municipal de Planejamento Urbano do Rio de Janeiro. (2023) “Relatório mensal de acompanhamento do Programa Reviver Centro”. September. Available at: (<https://planejamentourbano.prefeitura.rio/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2023/10/Programa-Reviver-Centro-Setembro-2023.pdf>).

units were launched in the area.¹⁰ Many of these new developments feature studio-sized apartments, as well as co-living and co-working spaces, catering both to a young, upper-middle class demographic and to potential investors looking to profit off the short-term rental market. This has led some to question the professed inclusiveness of Reviver Centro, since these audiences are far from fully representing the social, cultural and racial composition of Rio de Janeiro.

Between contradictions and confrontations: the black population of downtown Rio

Much of the discursive strategies employed in the context of Reviver Centro hinges on the assumption that the area was/is devoid of life, and therefore needs to be “resuscitated” by the arrival of new residents. This is, however, misleading. The business district of Rio de Janeiro largely overlaps with the city’s historical core, which has been traditionally inhabited by afro-brazilian communities since colonial times. Following the ban on slavery in the late XIXth Century, many former enslaved people chose to remain in the area as a means of easier access to job opportunities, either giving rise to favelas in the hills that encircle downtown Rio or occupying old tenement houses — known as *cortiços* — in the actual heart of the city.¹¹

Despite many *cortiço*-dwellers being violently evicted in the early decades of the XXth Century to open up space for Rio’s “hausmannization”, a significant number of them managed to take root. Against all odds, the working-class black communities of central Rio de Janeiro developed strong territorial bonds and lively cultural expressions, many of which became hallmarks of the supposedly cosmopolitan Brazilian identity. At the same time, however, their presence was largely deemed as negative, contributing to the racially-motivated feeling of deterioration and stigmatization which many citizens feel towards the central area.

The relationship between those communities and the Reviver Centro Program is contradictory at best, confrontational at worst. By pledging to “resuscitate” Rio de Janeiro’s city center, the official discourse actively engages in a process of erasure through which traditional presences are invalidated. One of the main concerns of the local population is that of gentrification and other associated forms of dispossession. The program tries to tackle those concerns in two fronts: by establishing a number of targeted initiatives aimed towards the promotion of racial awareness in the central area and by providing additional benefits to the inclusion of affordable units in new residential developments. While both measures boost already-addressed rhetorical strategies, their effectiveness is yet to be seen: while the local government pledges to defend and empower local black communities in the central area, as of October 2023, none of the 32 new residential developments in downtown Rio de Janeiro, either announced or under construction, included affordable units.

Another worrisome aspect of Reviver Centro is the way in which law enforcement is being deployed in the management of public spaces. Many of the *cortiço*-dwellers make their living as street vendors in the avenues and plazas of central Rio, selling anything from clothing to fruits. But in the months following the program’s approval, the local government delimited an exclusion zone, imposing severe limitations to their activities. Since then, street vendors in downtown Rio are being systematically repressed by law enforcement, with many of them having their goods taken away. Gathered around the Unified Camelô Movement (MUCA), one of the leading organizations dedicated to defending the rights of street vendors in Brazil, they have been protesting the imposed sanctions and the violent manner in which they are enforced. Despite this, up until this point the local government has

remained irreducible in its position, even proposing further expansions to the exclusion zone.

This stands as a sharp contrast with the supposed inclusiveness of Reviver Centro. While traditional black communities in the central area are discursively depicted as one of the backbones of the city’s cultural life by the local government, the program itself has seen little to no effort done to concretely include and empower them in the context of the transformations being made to Rio’s downtown area. This places said communities in a rather contradictory position of being simultaneously rhetorically celebrated and concretely attacked by the municipal government.

Conclusion

The often contradictory, often confrontational manner that characterizes the relationship between the Reviver Centro program and the traditional inhabitants of central Rio de Janeiro is prone to tensions and struggles. The prospective urban future depicted by Reviver Centro is said to be a democratic, socially-mixed one. But, as discussed above, at its current stage, the program is far cry from those idyllic and captivating images and narratives of equity and integration.

While real-estate agents engage in retrofitting old and underutilized office buildings into new mixed-use developments in order to attract an upper-middle class demographic, old-time city center dwellers, most of them black, working class individuals, are largely ignored and excluded from the program’s benefits. While local planners and policymakers resort to glossy concepts, such as sustainability, inclusivity and the FCM, they do so by dissolving the political connotations of these ideas. The result is threefold: the promotion of immaculate, politically devoid notions of both urban life and urban space, a boost to local and global real estate agents and an active — although deceived — endorsement of racialized dispossession and ontological erasure in central Rio de Janeiro.

¹⁰ Mourão, G. (2022) “Com 360 apartamentos no Centro, setor imobiliário lança segundo residencial pelo programa Reviver”. *Extra*, April 4. Available at: (<https://extra.globo.com/noticias/rio/com-360-apartamentos-no-centro-setor-imobiliario-lanca-segundo-residencial-pelo-programa-reviver-25467902.html>).

¹¹ Abreu, M. (1987). *A evolução urbana do Rio de Janeiro*. 1st edn. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar.

Dystopian Present-Futures: On the Unmaking and Making of Urban Palestine

Francesco Amoruso



<https://urbanac.city/tim>

Thinking about Palestinian urban futures in terms of dystopia, while Israel subjects the Gaza Strip to the most extensive and destructive aerial bombardment its besieged population has ever experienced, is no easy task. The current reality of Palestine seems to be by far surpassing the most pessimistic, gruesome, and dystopian imagination. At the time of writing (3 November 2023), almost ten thousand Palestinians have been killed. According to most estimates, nearly half of all housing units in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed or damaged by Israeli airstrikes. Aerial imagery, edited to provide numerous 'before and after' illustrations of the effects of Israeli bombardments, reveals the extent of the devastation. Every neighbourhood and refugee camp in Gaza has been hit, several of them entirely razed to the ground, reduced to enormous piles of rubble and dust enveloping the dead and the living. The gravity of this unfolding genocide is documented by the hundreds of videos and photos that Gazans have shared on social media, on WhatsApp, with friends and relatives abroad, and on every platform available, to show the world the brutality of this new chapter in the 75 year-long process of the ethnic cleansing of Palestine.

Settler Colonialism's Dystopian Present-Futures

The Zionist project, like other settler colonial projects across the world, is characterised by a zero-sum territorial logic. Moved by desire for territorial acquisition through frontier expansion and a parallel determination to incorporate as few natives as possible, settler colonial movements produce what Patrick Wolfe termed a 'logic of elimination'.¹ Throughout history and across the globe, this logic has been translated into a wide array of policies aimed at the elimination of the native, from genocide and ethnic cleansing to assimilation and confinement. In the case of Palestine, slow and capillary processes of elimination have alternated with violent eruptions of mass eliminatory violence, exemplified by the 1948 Nakba, the expulsions carried out during the 1967 war, and the current acceleration of settler colonial violence in the West Bank and the genocidal war on the Gaza Strip.² The settler colonial project in Palestine has had, and continues to have, an important urban dimension. Not only were Palestinian cities heavily targeted by Zionist militias in 1948 and largely emptied of their inhabitants, but Palestinian displacement from urban centres has continued to be a cornerstone of Israel's policies, as exemplified by the ongoing theft and demolition of Palestinian homes in Jerusalem's neighbourhoods of Silwan and Shaykh Jarrah. Despite the prominence of rural colonisation and the destruction of villages in the Palestinian collective imaginary, the struggle for Palestine is also, crucially, a struggle for the urban.

What is, then, the value of thinking through dystopia in a context dominated by such an existential struggle? It is no accident, after all, that both utopian and dystopian writing historically found little space within Palestinian cultural production. Basma Ghalayni, editor of a recent collection of Palestinian science fiction stories, explains this phenomenon by noting both Palestinian intellectuals' "cultural

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¹ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, n. 4 (2006).

² Wassim Ghantous and Mikko Joronen, "Dromolimination: Accelerating settler colonialism in Palestine," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 40, n. 3 (2022). Haim Yacobi and Michelle Pace, "Settler Colonialism (Without Settlers) and Slow Violence in the Gaza Strip," *Partecipazione e Conflitto* 14, n. 3 (2021).

duty to remember,” and the impression that engagement with this genre “is a luxury” for a people whose “cruel present (and traumatic past) have too firm a grip on [their] imaginations for fanciful ventures into possible futures.”³ In recent times, however, Palestinian cultural producers have turned to science fiction as a response to and means of critique of “the heterotemporality of the occupation.”⁴ Thinking through dystopia can also provide useful insights into settler colonialism as a future-making project. In particular, this issue’s call to reflect on ‘glossy’ dystopias alongside ‘negative’ interpretations of the genre offers an opportunity to shed light on the dual nature of Zionist settler colonialism, at once a force of destruction and construction. This contribution investigates the interplay between these two types of dystopias in the Palestinian urban past, present, and future, and what it tells us about the duality of the settler colonial project in Palestine and its impact on Palestinian urbanism.

Urbicide and the Ongoing Nakba

In a recent article, Palestinian archaeologist Mahmoud Hawari recollected the bombardment of his western Galilee village of Tarshiha in the conclusive phases of the 1948 ethnic cleansing.⁵ After the fall of the cities of Acre, Haifa, Safad, and Tiberias, Tarshiha was the last standing centre of Palestinian resistance in the Galilee. Just like today’s bombing of Gaza is being carried out under the pretence of fighting ‘terrorism’, the bombing of Tarshiha was justified by the need to put Arab resistance to rest. But just like the fall of Tarshiha permitted the completion of Zionist colonisation in the north of Palestine, today’s attack on Gaza is motivated by the Israeli leadership’s desire to remove Palestinians from the Strip and complete colonisation in the south.⁶ For the frontier to expand, Gaza, too, must fall. Past and present meet in what Palestinians call *al-nakba al-mustamirra* (‘the ongoing Nakba’ in English), the structure of elimination that characterises the colonial relations between the Israeli state and the indigenous Palestinian population. While the targeting of urban dwellings has been a consistent feature of Israeli settler colonialism, the 1948 Nakba was an ethnic cleansing campaign against a largely agrarian population. Today, the high degree of Palestinian urbanisation resulted from Israel’s spatial practices makes the Nakba an eminently ‘urbicidal’ process.

A piece of photographic evidence of Israel’s attacks on Palestinian urban centres that has been circulating on social media during the war on Gaza portrays another prominent Palestinian coastal city. In an Instagram post published by a Palestinian journalist, a photo shows the image of a flattened neighbourhood. A standing minaret and a single row of sea-facing buildings encircle the targeted area, totally destroyed. “This is not Gaza,” reads the caption, “this is Jaffa (today’s Tel Aviv settlement), central Palestine, which lost 98% of its Palestinian population in 1948.” Today’s dystopian reality for the survivors of the fall of Jaffa lies in the condition of exile of most of its original residents, the urban memoricide of Palestinian Jaffa and the ongoing displacement-through-gentrification of its remaining Palestinian population.⁷ Renamed with the Hebrew-sounding name Yafo, the city became part of the Tel Aviv–Jaffa conurbation, a ghostly relic of Arab Palestine next to the modern and bustling ‘Tel Aviv bubble’, symbol of Israel’s asserted liberalism, cosmopolitanism, and openness.⁸ Not a great deal of imagination is needed to paint a dystopic picture of Gaza’s possible future: Old Jaffa and Tel Aviv’s skyscrapers and nightclubs are only a one-hour drive from the Gaza prison, although entirely

3 Basma Ghalayni, *Palestine + 100: Stories from a century after the Nakba* (Manchester: Comma Press, 2019).

4 Hoda El Shakry, “Palestine and the Aesthetics of the Future Impossible,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 23, n. 5 (2021), 670.

5 Mahmoud Hawari, “From Tarshiha in 1948 to Gaza in 2023: Israel’s ethnic cleansing continues,” *The New Arab* (31 October 2023).

6 Several Israeli political and military leaders, as well as think tanks, have given statements and drafted policy documents proposing the annexation of the northern half of the Gaza Strip and the transfer of the Palestinian population to Egypt, in accordance with former US President Donald Trump’s ‘Deal of the Century’.

7 Nadi Abusaada, “Invisible terrains: Jaffa’s obscured history,” *Architectural Review* (14 October 2020).

8 Sharon Rotbard, *White City, Black City: Architecture and War in Tel Aviv and Jaffa* (London: Pluto Press, 2015).

inaccessible.

Jenin has paid a similar price to Tarshiha and Gaza, punished for being epicentres of Palestinian resistance. In the months leading up to the current events, increasing settler violence, attacks on Jerusalem’s holy sites, the acceleration of ethnic cleansing across the West Bank, and the lack of accountability for Israel’s actions, lead to a resurgence of Palestinian armed resistance, whose centres are the cities of Nablus and Jenin. Jenin, and particularly its refugee camp, suffered two major incursions in July and October. In both instances, Israeli military bulldozers destroyed roads and other infrastructure, including a hospital, while drone and artillery strikes caused major damage to the city and several casualties. The Israeli Defence Forces’ (IDF) targeting of Jenin’s urban space recalls the 2002 invasion and mass demolition of the camp, which lead Stephen Graham to argue that these military tactics reveal a continuum between urbicide, ethnic cleansing, and genocide.⁹

Glitzy Ghettos: Post-Oslo Urban Contradictions

During the first protest erupted in Ramallah against the Israeli Gaza onslaught in October 2023, Palestinian youths were filmed smashing a well-known installation in the centre of the city, spelling in big red letters ‘We Ramallah’, the ‘R’ in white producing the sentence ‘We are Ramallah’. Acts of rebellion against the municipal authority in Ramallah have a longer history, dating back to the years of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), when Ramallah became its de-facto capital. The influx of foreign aid and capital brought, among other things, traffic lights to Ramallah. In the early days of the second intifada, the IDF killed a young man from the Al-Amari, one of Ramallah’s refugee camps. In response to the killing, refugees from the camp chose a perhaps unexpected target, and tore down the traffic light installed by the PA outside one of the entrances to the camp: “the first day they broke the lights, the second day they took away the pylons and then, whenever the municipality would fix it, it would be destroyed again . . . until it was totally removed in 2006.”¹⁰ To understand why Palestinians would destroy the urban design of their own pseudo-capital to protest Israeli violence we must turn to Ramallah as the symbol of a promised urban modernity deeply embedded in exclusionary colonial logics unfolded in the last thirty years. The new urban colonial logic produced by the Oslo Accords (1993–95), which aimed at fragmenting Palestinians along geographical and class lines, eventually caused the rebelling youth to declare: ‘We are not Ramallah’.

As argued above, the logic of Zionism has proven to be consistently urbicidal, part of a broader strategy of undermining the social reproduction of the Palestinian national collective. Abujidi and Verschure define urbicide as the specific “targeting [of] cities for what they represent—as spaces of cosmopolitan life and tolerance, ranging from their buildings, assets, institutions, industries, and infrastructure and extending to their symbolic meanings.”¹¹ They especially emphasise how urbicide is the product of a two-fold logic: destruction on the one hand, and ‘design by construction’, which refers to the Israeli architectures of “colonization, settlement, and control of territory,” on the other.¹² But it is not only Israeli architecture that contributes to Palestine’s urbicide: construction in and of Palestinian urban space has also participated in the attempt to re-make Palestinian cities as pacified spaces as opposed to sites of resistance. This was achieved through Oslo and the establishment of Palestinian cantons in the West Bank, of which Ramallah became the epitome and symbol.

When Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, now controlling the whole of historic

9 Stephen Graham, “Bulldozers and Bombs: The Latest Palestinian–Israeli Conflict as Asymmetric Urbicide,” *Antipode* 34, n. 4 (2002).

10 Yazan Al-Khalili, “(R&B) rhythm and blues: post-traffic lights in Ramallah and Al-Bireh city,” *Race & Class* 52, n. 3 (2011), 49.

11 Nurhan Abujidi and Han Verschure, “Military Occupation as Urbicide by ‘Construction and Destruction’: The Case of Nablus, Palestine,” *The Arab World Geographer* 8, n. 4 (2006), 196.

12 Ibid., 199.

Palestine as well as its entire Palestinian population, it was faced with a dilemma: while fulfilling Zionism's territorial aspirations, the occupation was undermining its demographic ones. Unwilling to incorporate millions of Palestinians within the state by granting them citizenship, and unable to commit another mass ethnic cleansing, Israel's only option was to control the Palestinian population. But direct control was costly, and the first intifada showed that the strategy was unsustainable. The Oslo Accords devised an alternative strategy: Palestinian cities would be transformed into isolated semi-sovereign zones administered by the newly-established PA; full separation with Israel would be achieved by excluding hundreds of thousands of Palestinian workers from the Israeli labour market and establishing a permit regime which would end freedom of movement for Palestinians; and Palestinian economic activity in non-strategic sectors (services, IT, and real estate above all) would be allowed, fuelled by the Western donor community, which would tie profits and higher standards of living for the urban middle class to the continuation of the colonial status quo.

This is how some Palestinian towns, and Ramallah in particular, became glitzy ghettos, urban pockets of 'neoliberal apartheid' in which Palestinian middle classes are granted certain margins to fulfil their socio-economic aspirations and lifestyles. Yet, the wider West Bank territory is controlled by the Israeli military through checkpoints, IDF bases, watchtowers, and constantly subjected to land grabs to build new settlements and expand existing ones.¹³ Shopping malls, ad billboards, fancy cars, fountains and traffic lights, as well as the ever-present construction sites for the newest real estate project, coexist with frequent military incursions, infinite traffic jams caused by checkpoint closures, and many other forms of daily violence, symptoms of a society suffocated by a consumeristic debt economy that, while creating economic benefits for some, weakens social ties, disconnects people from the land, and makes communities more vulnerable to colonisation.

Palestine's Glossy Urban Dystopia: The City on the Hill

The present urban condition of Ramallah and other Palestinian urban centres just described per se does not constitute a dystopia, lacking the ironically grotesque character of dystopias, the anomalous and disorienting nature of hypo-reality. Despite it being a centre of power and the symbol of Palestinian colonial modernity, Ramallah is a deeply politicised city, and its contradictions subjected to persistent contestations and renegotiations. Before the Nakba, Ramallah was a small Christian village on the northern outskirts of Jerusalem whose small economic fortune relied on its location on a trade route towards the capital. The Nakba severed Ramallah from Jerusalem and entirely changed its social and economic fabric. Due to a substantial influx of refugees, the village grew into a town, and the town eventually became a de-facto capital due to Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem. Its hectic real estate activity is today one of Ramallah's signature features, testimony of a fast-growing city, a speculative bubble ready to burst, yet a place that conserves organic forms of modernity alongside the distortions of its colonial condition.

A new city has been built in the last decade just north of Ramallah, which constitutes an attempt to overcome and surpass these contradictions, contestations, and politicisations of urban space: Rawabi, the city on the hill, colloquially known with the caustic nickname of 'the first Palestinian settlement', in reference to its hilltop location and urban form resembling those of Israeli settlements, and as a way to mock its branding as 'the first New City in Palestine'. While celebrated by Palestinian elites as a proof of Palestinian readiness for statehood and a step forward in creating 'facts on the ground' that would eventually lead to an independent state, Rawabi is criticised by grassroots organisations as a project of economic normalisation with Israel and as part of the PA strategy of state-building under occupation.¹⁴

Rawabi's narrative is constructed both textually, through its website, social media channels, newsletters, and presence in the press, and physically, through its urban design. In both cases, it evokes traditional elements of Palestinian nationalism, such as steadfastness, as well as symbols, as the city proudly flies 'the largest Palestinian flag in the world'. However, it mobilises these symbols and discourses to establish a break with 'traditional' Palestinian society. Rawabi offers a new urban ideal, a city that is built according to a masterplan incorporating global design standards, a city run efficiently like a company (Rawabi has a municipal council but is in practice run by the developing company's CEO), a city that can provide a clean, green, luxurious oasis to the Palestinian middle-upper class. Thanks to his connections within the US and Israeli political and business establishments, the CEO Bashar Masri was able to build a new city while the West Bank built environment is generally strangled by settlement expansion when not directly threatened with demolitions and expulsions. His ambitions are beyond real estate, as he promises that projects like Rawabi can promote coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians by undermining 'extremist views' on both sides.¹⁵ Rawabi can hence afford to design a parallel reality, one in which the occupation is absent from the discourse, and where business activity can generate peace and prosperity.

If Tel Aviv stands as a dystopian admonishment of Gaza's potential future, and Ramallah as an example of the contradictory nature of colonial modernity and 'urbicide by construction', Rawabi constitutes a dystopian blueprint for a Palestinian urban future in which statehood and self-determination (or their pallid shadows) are achieved not as a result of a successful political struggle against the occupation, but through its acceptance. This project can be seen as the real-life present expression of the dystopic future envisioned by Palestinian filmmaker Larissa Sansour in the short film *Nation Estate*. In the film, Palestinians are granted an independent state in the space of a single skyscraper, providing a "vertical solution to Palestinian statehood."¹⁶ An ironic reference both to Oslo's promise of "the high life" and to Israel's "politics of verticality,"¹⁷ *Nation Estate* mirrors the promise of luxury and real estate ownership as promises of statehood embedded in the Rawabi project. "While the estate promises luxury," just like in Rawabi "the reality of the surveillance state remains firmly intact" but crucially less visible, "as identity papers and checkpoints are replaced by biometric verification."¹⁸

In the end . . .

To conclude, thinking through dystopia helps us capture and conceptualise present anxieties about the future, but can also serve as an exercise in critiquing and subverting the oppressive logics that work towards futures of continued domination. Despite the dystopian present-future it tells, Rawabi's story is only at the beginning. While it can be critiqued for the role it plays in consolidating a political reality that keeps the Palestinian people under colonial rule, as the reality on the ground changes, the city-project is destined to take a life of its own. The brutal violence displayed by Israeli soldiers and settlers in Gaza and in the West Bank, as Palestinian resistance also adopts increasingly violent means, demonstrates the instability of Israel's divide and rule strategy and the social pacification imposed and implied in urban projects like Rawabi. As dystopias, glossy or otherwise, give shape to collective anxieties and projections, they can be challenged and resisted, and the artistic and intellectual production that engages with them offer fertile ground for critiquing the present and building a different future.

(Durham: Duke University Press, 2021).

¹⁵ Elhanan Miller, "In Rawabi, the brand-new Palestinian city, both sides win," *The Times of Israel* (19 February 2014).

¹⁶ Larissa Sansour, *Nation Estate* (2012).

¹⁷ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2017).

¹⁸ EI Sharky, *ibid.*, 683.

¹³ Andy Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/Israel and South Africa after 1994* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Kareem Rabie, *Palestine Is Throwing a Party and the Whole World Is Invited: Capital and State Building in the West Bank*

Dystopian Transition?

Eleonora Nicoletti



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Urban Regeneration in the Energy Transition

Confirmed by the Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2015), the commitment to tackle the climate crisis and reduce carbon emissions worldwide produces major urban transformations for reducing dependence on fossil fuels. As noted by Blazquez, Fuentes and Manzan (2020), the move towards more sustainable energy sources and electrification is generally identified as the 'energy transition' which entails increasing reliance on renewable energy technologies, including solar among others. It is a long process, deeply affected by variations in policies, and is influenced by market conditions, business models and users' rising preference for renewable energy. It involves substantial technological transformations such as the switch from centralised to distributed electricity generation.

The growing electrification of transportation and heating systems, raising the demand for electric power in cities, requires new approaches to energy supply, integrated with decentralised energy generation (Mittelviehhaus, Georges and Boulouchos, 2022). This uses renewable sources and is seen as a desirable solution. The 'solar city' of Freiburg in Germany (Hopwood, 2007) and the BedZED project in the United Kingdom (Chance, 2009) exemplify urban developments that boast solar technologies supplying buildings with energy generated onsite as part of roofs and vertical facades instead of subtracting land from other uses. Among solar technologies, photovoltaics offer greater flexibility for building integration (Farkas and Horvat, 2012, p. 33) and can play a role in the energy transition. This, however, can have negative impacts. As suggested by Carley and Konisky (2020), it can exacerbate social inequalities. Whether the transformation may be positive for local communities can be questioned through a closer examination of specific cases or urban contexts.

This essay delves into the issue of urban regeneration for the energy transition, by considering examples of how it may affect local communities and the quality of public spaces. It explores how the image of urban environments may change through the spread of building-integrated photovoltaics (BIPVs). It looks into how these may impact the character and people's experience of urban environments while improving buildings' energy performance and supplying electric power from a renewable source. To facilitate this reflection, the article considers the case of Bristol in the United Kingdom in relation to exemplary low- or zero-carbon urban projects and existing literature.

Towards Energy-Focused Urban Renovations and Green Gentrification

If it negatively impacts local communities and increases inequality, the prospect of the energy transition may be seen as an 'eco-dystopia'. According to Malvestio (2022), the negative scenario visualised in 'dystopia' includes elements of the present and serves as a warning against a possible transforma-

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tion. When such a scenario has a focus on environmental aspects, the same author identified it as 'eco-dystopia'. This could be brought about by energy-focused renovations that can have non-negligible negative implications whilst improving the energy performance of the built environment.

While urban renewal projects may be intended for the collective benefit of stakeholders, they seldom focus on benefitting existing local communities. The increasing involvement of the private sector in driving urban developments has turned the city into 'a place to invest', and urban planning into a process depending on the market rather than on the engagement of residents. These tend not to be actors in the process of urban transformation or recipients of the benefits it may bring. By increasing the value of properties, urban renovations can raise the profits of investors. On the other hand, they can make housing less affordable for residents who may be forced out of the renovated areas (Tasan-Kok, Atkinson and Refinetti Martins, 2019).

Anguelovski et al. (2021) mentioned the issue of 'green gentrification', a type of urban transformation which introduces new 'environmental amenities' by attracting capital investments in undervalued urban areas, for the conversion of existing neighbourhoods. Gentrification attracts new, high-income residents to the transformed areas, and displaces vulnerable and lower-income residents whose physical and mental health and wellbeing are deeply affected. Among other cities, Bristol has been impacted by gentrification which negatively affects, for instance, individuals with lower incomes or belonging to ethnic minorities, as well as young people and the elderly (Anguelovski et al., 2021). Earley (2023) also highlighted the pressure of gentrification on local communities in Bristol, pointing at the challenges faced by community organisations in formerly industrial areas that have undergone substantial transformations. The same author stressed how the lack of support from the state does not facilitate urban regeneration processes led by local communities. Thus, these tend not to be involved in shaping the urban transformations they are affected by, including energy-focused renovations.

Energy-Focused Renovations: Reimagining the Urban Landscape

Within urban renovations, the energy performance upgrade of existing construction generally involves retrofitting the building envelope, which offers opportunities for the building integration of solar technologies like photovoltaics. These may be distinguishable as part of roofs or facades, as can be found in the Freiburg and BedZED examples or may be integrated invisibly as in the façade of Copenhagen International School (Corti et al., 2018, pp. 68-69). The latter shows how covering buildings in energy-generating elements can become a reality. Urban blocks and districts may be renovated through the integration of more thermally insulating materials and photovoltaics into the building envelope. This may be seen as an appealing solution to tackling the growing demand for energy efficiency and electricity from renewable sources. At the same time, it can be expected to deeply transform the image of cities.

If we refer to the Freiburg, BedZED and Copenhagen International School examples, we can notice that the appearance of photovoltaics tends to be characterised by modularity, standardisation, and often large areas of darker colours or glass surfaces. These features can be undesirable in certain contexts and could have significant effects on people.

Large photovoltaic surfaces with reflective glass covers can contribute to urban overheating. This is referred to as the Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect and may be exacerbated by BIPVs (Elhabodi et al., 2023). The rise in temperature in cities can be uncomfortable for many and can be expected to be a source of suffering especially for some demographic groups. The most affected include older and younger citizens, people living alone, women, ethnic minorities, low-income workers, pregnant women and individuals with health conditions among others who are at a higher risk of illness or

mortality (Ramly et al., 2023). In other words, vulnerable people can be expected to be affected the most.

The possible impacts of the extent, colour and modular patterns of photovoltaic surfaces on neurodivergent and sensitive individuals should also be considered and further explored. In autistic individuals, certain visual features of spaces, including particular uses of light, colours and patterns, may be triggers of different reactions such as overstimulation (Gaines et al., 2014). For migraine sufferers, patterns such as square-wave gratings can be a cause of discomfort as well as anxiety (Hine and White, 2021), which might result from arrays of typically dark-coloured solar modules. The spread of BIPVs may strongly alter the appearance and identity of urban environments, with potential repercussions on health and wellbeing.

In the case of Bristol, the city is characterised by a colourful image rich in street art which serves as a strong medium for expression, reflecting the diversity and creativity distinctive of the local community. The various murals across the city have become attractions and make the local urban landscape unique. Blanché (2015) mentioned Bristol to exemplify how street art can help boost the local economy through tourism. The same author noted how being characterised by images that occupy surfaces in public spaces, street art can convey messages to large audiences. Unlike other art forms, street art is 'site-specific' and shared extensively through online media (Blanché, 2015). Bristol's street art is periodically celebrated through Upfest, a festival in Bedminster, which can draw several thousands of visitors to the area (BBC News, 2022). The live painting which distinguishes the festival further highlights the 'performative' and 'participatory' characteristics of street art, that were mentioned by Blanché (2015). Thus, street art has the power to engage the community and contribute to the identity and the economy of the city.

Bristol can illustrate how the green transition may lead to an eco-dystopia. Not only it could increase inequalities in urban environments, but depriving the city of its street art in favour of energy-efficient and energy-generating building surfaces would deny the local community one of its key media for expression. Andron (2018) noted urban surfaces are qualitatively different from areas of the city that can be clearly defined as public or private. The same author stressed that people should be free to use urban surfaces and participate in the creation of the spaces they occupy, which includes the freedom of creating urban art and shaping a city's identity. Forte and De Paola (2019) showed that street art can benefit the local economy and enhance people's perception of urban spaces by encouraging social interaction, producing a sense of place and improving the quality of urban areas. Hence, reducing opportunities for street art appears to be a dystopian prospect.

Retrofitting buildings with BIPVs could have a major impact on the city's identity. There is potential for reimagining how the modern building stock with poor energy performance would become after energy-focused renovations. The visual features of BIPVs may be restrictive and unappealing for a city where facades become the canvas for street art. Increasing the extent of photovoltaic areas on buildings in Bristol could produce a city image unwanted by the local community. If energy-generating installations replaced street art on urban surfaces, it would be a cultural loss, besides potentially exacerbating inequalities as discussed earlier. On the other hand, if murals were painted on photovoltaic arrays, these would be stopped from absorbing sunlight and turning it into electricity. Extensively covering building surfaces with solar installations could affect residents' emotional bonds with places in Bristol. Such ties derive from the physical features of the city along with the activities and meanings people associate with spaces, which identifies a 'sense of place' as defined by Najafi and Shariff (2011). The 'sense of place' could be negatively affected by energy-focused renovations reducing street art in Bristol. Nonetheless, possibilities may be explored for maximising the benefits of both street art and energy-focused transformations. Engaging the local community in the discus-

sion and decision-making about how the city could change for the energy transition could lead to more just, less profit-oriented and more context-specific solutions, respecting the unique identity of the city and its people.

Energy Transition: An Urban Dystopia?

The above considerations expose some of the issues found in views of the energy transition as a positive change for cities, showing how it can lead to an urban dystopia rather than sustainable development. Energy-focused renovations carrying environmental benefits can be expected to exacerbate social inequalities and generate cultural losses reducing diversity in cities. The possible environmental advantages do not justify the aggravation of existing social issues. These are already intensified by disasters caused by climate change and should not be worsened by the solutions to it. Negative effects could include broadening the gap between wealthy and low-income groups, marginalising minorities, displacing vulnerable individuals, and breaking people's emotional bonds with places, as well as possible impacts on health and wellbeing.

Monaco (2023) highlighted the drawbacks of technology-centred strategies for tackling the climate crisis, stressing the importance of systemic transformations. These should address social inequalities through collaborative efforts while implementing technology changes. Thus, a technocratic approach to overcoming the current climate crisis should be challenged. Instead, a bottom-up approach involving local communities in shaping their environments could divert us from turning the energy transition into a dystopian reality. Such an approach should be respectful of the needs of local communities, their emotional attachments to places, and their preferences for free expression and interaction within the urban areas they inhabit. Local communities should be fully engaged in transforming their cities within the energy transition. They should be enabled to have a say on whether and how renewable energy technologies should be integrated into the built environment they live in.

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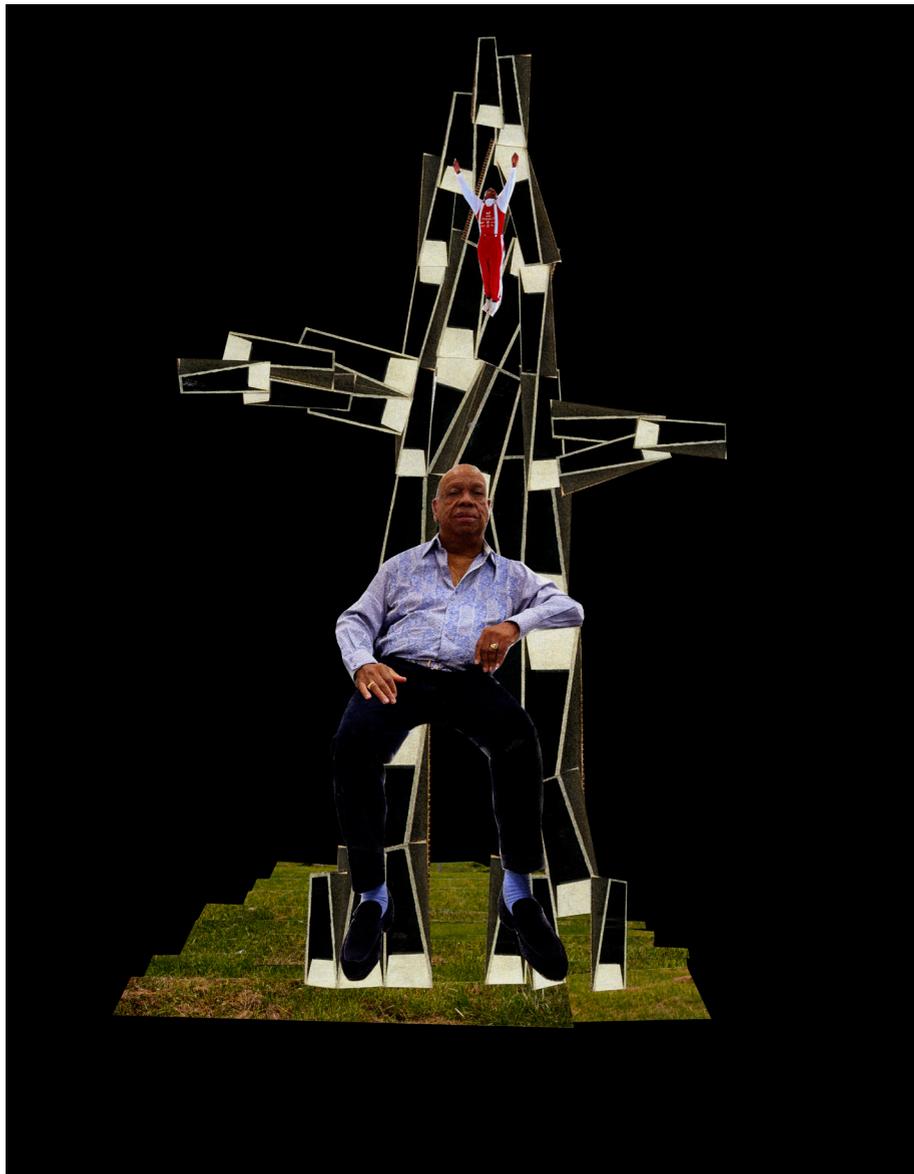
LAND NARRATIVES | FANTASTIC FUTURES exposes the lost histories and unrecognised imaginations of creativity born in spite of the segregation and land vacancy found in 'Black Belt' neighbourhoods of Chicago's South Side. It develops new, multiple, and wayward 'yardsticks' for identifying and working with previously unmeasured cultural values. The installation uses collage, mapping, film, and voice-generated 3D clay objects to transform and translate the cultural practices, joys, and dreams of eight Chicagoans into a fantastic future – a vision composed of a taxonomy of architextures for Black space, ownership, and development.

The work is made by Vessels and Portrait Collages.



The Vessels are 3D printed sound objects that hold the voices of each Chicagoan. The patterned texture on each vessel is the frequency map of their audio recorded interview. The form of each vessel is inspired by memories of place and the superpowers each would use to create spaces of Black joy, empowerment, and fulfillment. The eight Vessels are arranged in a circle on a symbolic parcel of vacant land where its latent monetary value and potential to build Black wealth is exposed.

The Portrait Collages present the being of each of the eight Black Chicagoans. Each person is planted on the land from which their imaginary and superpowers are illustrated



<https://urbanac.city/father-tolliver>

using Chicago-based references of southside mid-century modern architecture, black-owned establishments and institutions, Black cultural practices. The ‘flyers’ (Jesse White Tumblers), the ‘butterflies’, the ‘hair’ appear across the portraits, video and map to reference commonly held beliefs and aspirations of the Black Chicagoans about freedom, liberation, mobility and the transcendence of Black cultural production.

BUTTERFLY Exported transcendence of Black culture. HAIR Connectedness of Black people across the Black diaspora. FLYERS Black resilience, excellence, and ascension in the face of adversity. LAND Images of chronic land vacancy in the historic Black Belt neighborhood on the south side of Chicago.



The Map brings scale to the abundance of land availability as a canvas for creating Black space and wealth in neighborhoods owned and controlled by Black people. The Map presents an imaginary snapshot of possibility if the eight Black Chicagoans constructed a collective Fantastic Future.

<https://urbanac.city/landnarrativesfantasticfutures>

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Boring dystopias in fictional geographies: affective atmospheres of enclosure

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Introduction

The prevalence of crises, such as pandemics, wars, climate catastrophes, has become increasingly entwined with the normalization of dystopic realities in everyday life. We employ the term boring dystopia to frame these cruel realities that have been ingrained into everyday life and accepted as the norm. This seemingly paradoxical word pairing indicates that dystopias do not solely describe abstract, alien visions of a future world.¹ Instead, a closer examination of boredom allows us to highlight the normalization of dystopic conditions and the accompanying processes of submission and acceptance. The term thus also captures the everyday, material and affective dimensions of dystopian experiences.

To understand these realities and render them more tangible, this article uses enclosure as a conceptual entry point to analyze the material and affective dimensions of *boring dystopias* through fictional geographies in film (Sharp 2000, Rose 2001). Investigating how enclosure is practiced, endured and perpetuated, our contribution is twofold. Firstly, we unveil how processes of normalization and embodiment effectively obscure dystopic everyday life by turning them into *boring dystopias*. Secondly, by examining *boring dystopias* as affective atmospheres, we raise questions regarding the individual's capacities and power to transcend atmospheres of enclosure.

Enclosure has been a geographical concept primarily discussed in relation to the production and spatial and social boundaries (Vasudevan, McFarlane and Jeffrey 2008, Hodkinson 2012) and rarely through its everyday, material and affective dimensions. However, as we argue in this paper, enclosure is not only materially conditioned, socially experienced, and individually felt; it is also atmospheric. Drawing on cultural geographic works on affect, we understand affective atmospheres as an enveloping emotional and affective space that emerges through the social interactions and practices in specific material settings.

To grasp the affective atmospheres of enclosure and the ways they shape everyday life, the paper delves into *Parasite* (2019) — a film whose unique absurdity enables an exploration of the cruel potential of *boring dystopias*. Through film analysis,² this paper explores how enclosure shapes intimate spaces of dystopic everyday life and how affective moments of shame and disgust within this context

¹ The term *boring dystopia* has been propagated in a subreddit with more than 757,000 members ([reddit.com/r/ABoringDystopia](https://www.reddit.com/r/ABoringDystopia)) since 2016 (Reddit n.d.). A subreddit is a subcategory of the website Reddit that encompasses a community of interest or a specific topic. The term boring dystopia originates from a Facebook group founded by cultural theorist Mark Fischer in 2015 to raise awareness about the state of the UK.

² For more details on methodology see Ren, J., I. Dimitrakou, L. Gehrig, F.-J. Grafe & H. Hilbrandt (2023) Langweilige Dystopien in fiktiven Geographien. *suburban. zeitschrift für kritische stadtforschung*, 11, 205–234.

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are normalized. The analysis of key scenes shows how atmospheres of enclosure are imposed on and contested by protagonists; embodied experiences, emotions and affects produce and reinforce normative orders of enclosure.

Boring dystopias and affective atmospheres of enclosure

Our analysis employs the term *boring dystopias* to critically question normative assumptions about the nature of dystopia and the ways in which people respond to it. Thinking through approaches that acknowledge agency in a variety of practical and emotional responses to violence— including disaffection (Bissell 2022) and boredom (Anderson 2021) – the article expands understandings of dystopia to include cruel realities that are inscribed into everyday life. The concept of *boring dystopias* designates the status quo as dystopic to enable its critique. Beyond questions about idleness, monotony or a lack of meaning (Miszta 2016) within dystopic conditions, *boring dystopias* highlights dynamics of normalization of a cruel everyday life through processes of acquiescence.

To empirically elaborate on boring dystopia, we turn to scholarship on socio-spatial enclosures (Vasudevan et al. 2008), particularly studies that account for the experiences of enclosure and their everyday, affective and embodied dimensions (Bonds 2019, Fuller and Marquardt 2008). Enclosure framed as a lived condition i.e., a state of being enclosed, constitutes an involuntary and violent experience that curtails everyday life by limiting interactions with others and the world. The condition of being enclosed includes modes of coping or subversion that test the inescapability of the cruel realities of everyday life. The lived condition of enclosure is, therefore, a means to understand the constitution of *boring dystopias*.

To capture the everyday, material, embodied and emotional dimensions of enclosure, we draw on geographical literature on affect and affective atmospheres (Anderson 2006, 2009, 2014, Duff 2010, Gammerl and Herm 2015, Stewart 2007). Analyses of affect show how human bodies experience affect through interacting with other bodies in material spaces, for example, during shared experiences, interactions, encounters, and performances (O’Grady 2018). In this context, bodies function both as means of understanding the world and a medium expressing the meaning of a situation in which bodies act (ibid.). Affect, thus, enables capturing the transpersonal dimensions of bodily life and everyday existence (Tolia-Kelly 2006). While affect is experienced by individual bodies, it is the interaction between bodies and material spaces what shapes the capacity to affect and to be affected (Anderson 2006). Ben Anderson (2009) argues that affect does not exist per se but it is manifested through affective atmospheres. Following Gernot Böhme, Anderson explains how one can feel oneself to be surrounded by a (friendly or a tense) atmosphere and how these different atmospheres in turn “envelop” people (ibid.: 80). Furthermore, Mikkel Bille and Kirsten Simonsen (2021, 305) have emphasized the crucial role of human agency and bodily practices in mediating and shaping these atmospheres, considering the ambiguous ontological status of affective atmospheres.

The following section analyzes the atmospheres of enclosure in Bong Joon-ho’s film *Parasite* (2019 screenplay: Bong Joon-ho and Han Jin-won) – a social commentary about the inescapable social enclosures in everyday Seoul. Our analysis of the fictional geographies of *Parasite* looks at the atmospheres of enclosure as it is manifested through emotions and affects, examining their significant role in shaping conditions and modalities of enclosure and dystopian everyday life more broadly. The film’s genre (dark comedy) coupled with our analytical focus on ordinary domestic spaces portrayed in the film guides a reflection about the mundane, ordinary aspects of dystopia.

Tracing affective atmospheres of enclosure

Parasite depicts socio-spatial divisions and economic inequality under late capitalism through the parallel lives of two families in Seoul: the impoverished Kims, living in a basement apartment in a

cramped and dirty neighborhood, and the affluent Parks, residents of a villa designed by a famous architect in the hills of the city. The fates of these two families intertwine when the Kims infiltrate the Parks’ privileged life as domestic workers. What begins as a promise of prosperity and a success story of social climbing turns into a thriller that ends in a struggle for survival. *Parasite* sheds light on the normalization of stark social divisions and the individualized efforts and failures to overcome them, highlighting the cruelty of *boring dystopias*.

The film establishes overlapping modes of enclosure that are continuously and violently enforced: viewers experience how enclosure in social positions is (re-)produced through interactions with space. This is evident in the two families’ materially and spatially segregated worlds, which is central to the film’s narrative. Their visual juxtaposition also plays a crucial role in how the experience and sense of enclosure is represented. For example, the scenes depicting the Kims’ basement apartment being used as a public toilet and fumigated as a space infested with vermin sharply contrast with the portrayal of the Parks’ austere, hygienic and secure villa with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking a well-trimmed, green lawn.

Against the backdrop of these unequal domestic worlds, the encounters between the poor and the elites are transgressions of largely segregated lives, as evidenced when the Kims become domestic workers in Park’s house. The relation between social and spatial boundaries becomes visible and palpable to the protagonists only when these worlds interact. Thus, spatial proximity and moments of cross-class co-existence are crucial. In one scene, the Kims secretly enjoy an opulent night in the villa while the homeowners are away and celebrate their success of deceiving the Parks into hiring the entire family. When the Parks suddenly return, the Kims hide under an oversized coffee table. As the Parks settle down on the sofa, the Kims lie cramped together on the floor at their feet.

The scene translates social differences into affective atmospheres: On the couch, the wealthy Parks share a moment of sexual intimacy in comfort and security. On the floor, the Kims are cramped, hiding under the table in fear, shame and discomfort. As the Parks cuddle and discuss their domestic workers pejoratively, complaining of their smell, the Kims lie prostrate in darkness, packed in like sardines and relegated their social position. The juxtaposition of different affective atmospheres in the same material space renders visible the social boundaries and the impossibility of overcoming them. The languid, intimate sounds of the Parks talking to each other on the sofa until they fall asleep contrasts the silent, sweaty discomfort of the Kims on the floor, desperate to escape. The co-existence of different affective atmospheres in the scene illustrates how shared space is insufficient to overcome their enclosure in class differences.

Being locked in different social positions is further entrenched in moments of direct encounter or bodily proximity. Although the Kims believe in the myth of social mobility and the Parks seek to be fair employers, in private, the Parks remark that the Kims have the smell of “people who ride the metro” (*Parasite* 2019: 1:28). In moments of encounter between the Parks and the Kims, this smell becomes an insurmountable affective boundary between the two families and the two social worlds. It inscribes the dystopia of a polarized society, and their enclosure within different social classes into their bodies. The dialogue makes this point explicit when the Parks remark to each other that although the Kims are aware of their social status and do not transgress their position in their behavior, the body odor does not respect this boundary. Even though the Kims temporarily improve their lives through their employment and income, class seems to stick with them in the form of this smell. These encounters highlight how unpleasant smells represent a kind of “sensory indiscipline” (Jones 2012, 647), a reminder of stubborn and insurmountable social positions. Given that “sounds, smells, etc. influence the transpersonal circulation of moods and feelings” (Jayne, Valentine and Holloway 2010, 549), these scenes manage to capture the circulation of smells and create affective atmos-

pheres that transcend individual emotion. Indeed, one of the much-praised aspects of the film is how it establishes class not through the protagonists' dialogue, but through the motif of smell. The smell, inextricably linked to their bodies, serves as a means of social demarcation, which the Parks convey in their disgust. It also serves as a form of social enclosure, hindering the Kims' hopes for social mobility.

As described above, the social positions in *Parasite* are initially porous, enabling the Kims to settle into the Park's household. Through strategies such as forging certificates and business cards, the Kims can escape their status, at least temporarily, and earn money in the shadow of Park's prosperity. This attempt to cross social boundaries is a transgression, but a precarious one. As the family hides under the table, the smell that clings to their bodies threatens to betray them. In addition to the embodied nature of this social threat, the scene also illustrates how emotions shape and determine social belonging and its transgressions. Disgust, shame and bitterness are important components of their shared everyday lives, which situate both families in different social positions. Neither the Parks' etiquette nor the Kims' restraint manage to cover up these emotional allocations. Instead, emotions reinforce the inscribed social positions. This embodied and felt enclosure underscores a boring dystopia characterized by the ingrained banality of poverty – or by the privilege that can be made visible in small gestures of disgust.

Although the Kims manage to avoid being discovered in that moment, the impossibility of breaking out of their social class becomes increasingly clear in the conflict with a second family of domestic servants who have already covertly taken up a residence with the Parks. The dramatic climax of the film is set in the scene of a garden party where the husband of the former housekeeper emerges from villa's underground bunker where he had been living secretly. He violently attacks the Kims, stabbing the Kims' daughter in the heart. Mr. Park – instead of offering help or showing horror or compassion for the bleeding daughter – demands his car keys. Mr. Kim throws the keys to him, but they fall under the now dying bunker dweller. When Mr. Park moves his body to get the key, he retches in disgust at the smell and holds his nose. The poverty of life in the bunker is also inscribed in this body through smell (*Parasite* 2019: 1:54). At the moment of the attack, the different affective atmospheres of the Kims and the Parks collide: the Kims are exhausted from a night in an emergency shelter due to the flooding of their basement apartment, stressed from the extra work of organizing a last-minute party, fearful of being found out and remorseful in relation to the other basement dwellers. Meanwhile, the Parks celebrate a children's birthday party, in lightness and an atmosphere of pleasure (catering), amusement (string ensemble) and costume play. The simultaneity of incongruous moods that runs through the entire film illustrates how the families are enclosed in separate social worlds. This key scene shows what it means to accept this social enclosure – and how terrible and simultaneously inescapable it is. It shows that enclosure becomes a boring dystopia when attempts to escape fail and an unbearable condition becomes normalized, embodied and felt in everyday life.

The murder scene merges these different family moods into one: absurd horror. The film conveys in a slow-motion montage how this new injury leads Mr. Kim to attack Mr. Park, the climax of the scene. With Mr. Park's physical response to the smell, he can no longer hide his disgust and is thus also trapped in his sheltered social position. This realization fuels Mr. Kim's anger, driving him to stab Mr. Park. In the movie's coda, we learn how the Kims find themselves in their former, constricted position in their basement apartment. The idea of escaping their social positions remains a myth.

Discussion and conclusion

This article argues for an understanding of enclosure through affective atmospheres. It asks how enclosure is normalized in everyday life as a boring dystopia, made invisible or fought against. The concept of affective atmospheres allows us to understand enclosures not only as material, spatialized (e.g., under tables and in basement apartments) and socially constructed (e.g., through discourses

around class and work), but also through the interactions, feelings and practices that produce enclosure atmospherically and situationally.

Our analysis discussed elements that constitute these atmospheres of enclosure, such as bodies, smells, emotions, social positions and material spaces. With this, we identify two key facets of affective atmospheres: Firstly, emotions are not only internalized, but also go beyond the individual. In the emotions of shame and disgust expressed in the reactions to the bodily odors of Mr. Kim and Mr. Park, a social enclosure can be recognized that is attached to the body and thus seemingly inescapable. Yet, it is only through the interaction of these words and the encounter of bodies that this enclosure is made evident. An understanding of the relational feelings, interactions and reactions of the protagonists, beyond their individual experience, is important for an analysis of affective atmospheres that constitute *boring dystopias*.

Secondly, these constituent elements make it possible to understand how affective atmospheres determine subjects' capacity to feel and act. Affective atmospheres of enclosure are porous, yet people dwell in these atmospheres in different ways. Their ability to influence or be influenced by them varies significantly (cf. Anderson 2006, Tolia-Kelly 2006). In atmospheres of enclosure, different patterns of social order are entangled with specific emotions; Mr. Kim's anger and resentment are perhaps the most salient emotions that delineate his enclosure. It is also these emotions that shape actions that challenge and reinforce existing socio-spatial boundaries of enclosure and the hierarchies established within them. However, affective atmospheres do not preclude actions aimed at violently breaking through the structures of enclosure. Instead, they show how even *inboring dystopias* a desire to break out can transform the landscape.

Metaverse Cities

Deconstructing a glossy urban dystopia

Luis Martin Sanchez

Metaverse: a glossy utopia in a polycrisis scenario?

On 29 October 2021, after almost two years of pandemic crisis, Facebook Inc., the famous multinational technology conglomerate, announced at the company's annual conference, the immediate change of the corporation name to Meta Platforms Inc. The announcement marks a change of strategy of the first social network towards the construction of the 'Metaverse', beginning what many consider a further revolution towards Web3.0. However, the issue of building virtual 'worlds' was certainly not new. Already by the end of 2021, there were at least 160 companies dedicated to the 'construction' of Metaverses. However, the change of name of an important multinational as Facebook, as well as the announcements of huge investments in this disruptive technology (software and hardware) had the effect of putting the topic of the controversial 'Metaverse' at the centre of public and academic debate.

Although relatively recent, the term Metaverse is certainly not new either. It has been used for the first time by writer Neal Stephenson in his novel *Snow Crash* (1992, 35),¹ a post-cyberpunk science fiction novel about a dystopian late-capitalism America, where the Metaverse is an escape route from the "precariousness of being in the world" (Butler 2013). A situation very similar to the pervasive 'polycrisis' (Zeitlin et al. 2019) that contemporary territories are experiencing today. In fact, the Metaverse is seen by many as a glossy refuge² for an elite class in an 'end of the world' scenario. Rather than elitist and glossy virtual utopias, the hypothesis of this text is that many of the most problematic dynamics of neoliberal cities emerge in a radical way in many of the early experiments of virtual cities. And precisely because of this, they are a privileged observatory in which to investigate certain tendencies of contemporary territories. Although there is an extensive disciplinary literature on the relationship between planning and virtual or augmented reality (linked mainly to the gaming industry), this often avoids design issues and ethical values. For this reason this text attempts to construct a radical critique of virtual cities, with the idea that it may be useful to improve urban policies and projects in virtual and non-virtual worlds.

¹ Stephenson writes: "As Hiro approaches the Street, he sees two young couples, probably using their parents' computer for a double date in the Metaverse, climbing down out of Port Zero, which is the local port of entry and monorail stop. He is not seeing real people of course. This is all part of the moving illustration drawn by his computer according to the specification coming down the fiber-optic cable. The people are pieces of software called avatars."

² Perhaps the most popular recent reference point for the Metaverse is *Ready Player One*, the novel by Ernest Cline (2011), adapted into a film directed by Steven Spielberg in 2018. Cline's Metaverse is symbolically named the "Oasis," an utopian virtual world where people plug in in order to escape from the real dystopian environment.

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Crisis and new urban issues: the rise of virtual cities during pandemics

Although the first virtual worlds preceded Covid-19 pandemic outbreak by more than twenty years (Active World and Second Life, for example),³ and without wishing to diminish the role played by technological advances, it is evident how the sudden arrival of the pandemics accelerated a process that had been underway for years. The pandemic, and the various lockdowns associated therewith, by increasing social anxiety, fear of contact, and the absolute desire for immunisation (Iman, Smaraki and Rumela 2022), created the ideal conditions for the take-off of the Metaverse, which allows forms of non-bodily socialisation in conditions of mandatory physical distance.⁴

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the topics of virtual reality, for years neglected by urban planners (Hudson-Smith 2022), forcefully enter the disciplinary debate during pandemic crisis. As Secchi (2013) suggest, crises and urban issues often coincide in history and often bring to light new themes and forms of design, new subjects and new conflicts. With the pandemic, issues such as virtual cities, which were marginalized before the crisis, became intrinsically relevant in the architectural and urban debate and future projections, accelerating and transforming the smart city paradigm, one of the core urban planning questions before pandemics (another glossy dystopia of recent years).⁵ For sure the violent arrival of the pandemic crisis and its intertwining with the environmental crisis has forcefully brought back to the centre of our disciplines the need to rethink in all its complexity the relationship of the human with the more-than-human, category that includes an infinity of subjects, from non-human animals to the new digital technologies.

In such a perspective, 'virtuality' is not considered in a binary perspective as an 'other' to 'reality' but as an integral part of which is 'real'. In our everyday life the interrelationships between bodies, software and machines, the symbiosis between users and devices and the algorithmic autonomies cancel out the perception of differences between human and more-than-human actions a condition that Jessica McLean (2020) calls "more-than-real". The advent of the Metaverse further stresses this relationship between virtuality and reality and opens up new issues for the design of the more-than-real spatialities.

What are we talking about when we talk about Metaverse?

The Metaverse can perhaps be defined as a digital space with an economic structure, occupied by avatars, sometimes mirroring the 'real' world, but with multiple representations of the physical world and the ability to change time, physics and space (Hudson-Smith 2022). According to Radoff (2021), the Metaverse is "the collective set of online and connected experiences one can have. The common theme is that the 'player' is connected to an online structure that allows them to change content live, connect to social live, or monetise live. The key word is 'live'. The Metaverse is a living multiverse of worlds." Ball (2021) for his part defines the Metaverse as an extended network of persistent, real-time rendered 3D worlds, simulations that support the continuity of identity, objects, history, pay-

³ Active Worlds is an online virtual world, developed by ActiveWorlds Inc., and launched on June 28, 1995. On the other hand Second Life is an online multimedia platform, developed and owned by the San Francisco-based firm Linden Lab and launched on June 23, 2003, that allows people to create an avatar for themselves and then interact with other users and user-created content within a multiplayer online virtual world.

⁴ In her poem 'The Fifth Wall', written during pandemic, the German moving image artist Hito Steyerl (2021) writes: "Pandemia has pushed many people into another dimension of time space — a next level of screen-based extraction. People were shocked to find the walls shutting them in had become means of communication. Their enclosures were laced with cables leading into a maze of plugs, wires and radio connections. A space of strings, proprietary infrastructure and code, separating humans and filtering communication. Fenced off by access codes, log-ins and mandatory isolation pandemia left people little choice but to perform on corporate stages, and in the process become readable and transparent to them."

⁵ On this topic, see: Ben Green (2019) *The Smart Enough City: Putting Technology in Its Place to Reclaim Our Urban Future*.

ments and rights and that can be experienced synchronously by an effectively unlimited number of users, each with a sense of individual presence. Robertson and Peters (2021) note that the Metaverse is an aspirational term for a future virtual world more tangibly connected to our real lives and bodies.

Despite the concept of the Metaverse is still under development and there is not yet a complete and definitive implementation, the economic pressures from big tech and other large technology companies as well as large investment funds to adopt virtual reality and enter Web3.0 are enormous. The advent of the Metaverse represents a fundamental shift in today's notion of digital presence, a shift that cannot be ignored for long by the disciplines that deal with the design of cities and territories.

Old urban issues in new virtual cities

The following paragraphs examine, without the ambition to be exhaustive, some urban issues that have emerged from observing some of the most mainstream virtual city experimentations and that approach, in different ways, the Metaverse concept, including software such as Decentraland, Horizon Worlds, Minecraft, Liberland Metaverse and Qtopia.

Metaverses as private cities: the neoliberal dream

The first urban issue concerns the private character of these virtual cities, ultimate expression of the neo-liberal city project. In fact, in these first experiments, consolidated urban problems of the contemporary city seem to reappear: from financialisation and privatisation processes, to spatial and socio-economic inequalities, to redlining and touristification processes, just to name a few.

One factor that should not be underestimated is that, unlike the World Wide Web or the Internet itself, which were financed by large public institutions, the funding for the development of Web3.0 comes from large private multinationals. The major player in the Metaverse race is clearly Meta, but it is not alone. Other big technology companies such as Microsoft, Roblox, Decentraland, and Epic Games are also major players in the Web3.0 big race. The completely private character of the cities of the first Metaverse experimentations stands as the ultimate expression of the neoliberal-era city. Not surprisingly, many of the urban issues that plague the contemporary city emerge radically in the cases observed.

For example, strong processes of urban financialisation that can already be seen in platforms such as Decentraland,⁶ where in recent years there has been an incredible increase in the prices of plots sold in the form of NFT.⁷ The price of lots from the launch of the platform (2017) to today has increased by about 60.000 per cent, generating a big public interest. In the virtual city of Decentraland, as in contemporary metropolises, centrally located plots have higher prices than peripheral ones. As Goldberg, Kugler, and Schär argue (2022), location matters even in a virtual world with negligible mobility costs like Decentraland. It emerges how new virtual cities incorporate traditional real estate market dynamics and thus it is no coincidence that virtual real estate agencies have arisen in recent years, such as the very popular Metaverse Properties. In this way, it would seem that the cities of the Metaverse designed for a glossy elite are avoiding, or worse, normalising, some of the most problematic contemporary urban issues such as spatial inequalities, redlining and the exclusion of minorities and vulnerable groups.

⁶ Decentraland is a virtual reality platform powered by Ethereum's blockchain where users can create, experience and monetise content and applications. The grounds of Decentraland are permanently owned by the community, which thus has full control over its creations. Here, users claim ownership of a virtual land on a blockchain-based ledger and land owners control what content is published on their portion of land, identified by a set of Cartesian coordinates (x,y). Land is a non-fungible, transferable and scarce (90,000 plots circa) digital asset stored in an Ethereum smart contract and can be purchased by spending an ERC20 token called MANA (Ordano et al. 2017).

⁷ NFT stands for 'non-fungible token'. A non-fungible token is a unique digital identifier that is recorded on a blockchain, and is used to certify ownership and authenticity.

Also issues related to the digital divide posed by the Metaverse diffusion cannot be left aside. Despite the fact that many of these experiences emphasise the potential of accessibility to services even in isolated situations – e.g. the Seoul Metaverse, which provides access to many public services and was launched during the pandemics⁸ – it is clear that it poses accessibility problems for people without the possibility of acquiring or using hardware and software that allow them to take advantage of the Metaverse experience, potentially generating dynamics of economic, ableist and/or generational inequality.

Design imaginaries in virtual cities: the dictatorship of neoliberal realism

The second issue has to do with the urban design and its imaginaries, which often re-proposes rooted and highly traditional techno-capitalistic scenarios – despite the potentially high degree of creative freedom of the virtual medium – without producing particularly innovative design experimentation.

There are two main trends, which are not mutually exclusive, that highlight the strength of the ‘dictatorship of realism’ in the practices and imaginaries of virtual urban design. On the one hand, there are widely popular aesthetics related to the gaming industry imaginaries as in Second Life, Roblox and especially Minecraft. Minecraft,⁹ described by many as a kind of digital Lego (Olmedo 2013), is exemplary of this type of aesthetic. It is an open ‘sandbox’ game in which players build textured cubic constructions, block by block, in a world with its own physical laws (Overby and Jones 2015).

On the other hand, there are aesthetics drawn from the neo-liberal ‘smart’ city imaginaries, and among the cases investigated the best example is the Liberland Metaverse.¹⁰ Designed by the famous Zaha Hadid studio, the forms and spaces of this digital city are not particularly different from the studio’s designs in the Far East or the Gulf countries. The forms and spaces are more or less the same (i.e. emphasis on fluidity and continuity of forms), issues and obsessions of contemporary design are repeated (i.e. very traditional techno-ecological scenarios).

With the grand narratives of the 20th century gone, it would seem that the imaginaries of urban design are abandoning their utopian (that turned out to be modern dystopias more than once) instances, “that insolent claim to change the world” (Hirschmann 1982). The design imaginaries of the Metaverse virtual cities are very distant from the ideological, formal and spatial tensions of the two dominant urban models of the Modern Movement, Broadacre City and Ville Radieuse, but also from the radical high-tech urban and architectural experimentation linked to the emergence of cybernetic systems (Schoffer 1969) in the late 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

Virtual cities regulatory apparatus: between surveillance capitalism and a bubble-city scenario

A third urban issue has to do with the regulatory apparatus of virtual cities, which struggle between the desire for freedom and the need for regulation challenging norms, rights and values rooted in liberal democracies. An issue that also has to do with the excessive dominance of private corporations and which poses the question: who sets the rules of the game in the Metaverse? A question that leads us to reflect on governance, decision-making issues, power and exclusions in the virtuality.

The issues with sensitive data management (and data extractivism) and content regulation of major social networks are infamously well known (Urman and Makhortykh 2023). These factors are taken

⁸ Seoul Metaverse offers government services such as tax assistance, 3D environments, user-based avatars, virtual multi-office communication tools, urban gaming, and virtual touristic programs.

⁹ Minecraft is one of the key tools for citizen engagement in UN-Habitat urban projects used as a community participation tool for public space design.

¹⁰ Liberland Metaverse is a virtual city created as an extension of the Free Republic of Liberland, a libertarian micro-state founded by right-wing Czech activist Vít Jedlička in 2015 on a swampy plot of land only three square miles in the border between Croatia and Serbia. Not being officially recognised by any nation, the libertarian experiment decided to move to the virtual domain. To date it counts, according to its promoters, more than 700,000 applications for citizenship.

to the limit in Web3.0, where the experience of immersion and presence (La Trofa 2022) is more pervasive. For instance, important biometric data, from retinal dilation to heart rate, may be collected for population profiling and regulation has to deal not only with fake news or hate speech but also with acts, movements, and gestures.

In this regard, some cases of sexual harassment on Horizon Worlds (Diaz 2022) raised numerous questions about the interrelationship between the ‘real’ and the virtual field. Meta’s response to these cases has been the creation of the ‘safe space’, conceived ‘as a personal security bubble’, which recalls Peter Sloterdijk’s anti-modernist metaphors in the Spheres trilogy (1998, 1999, 2004).¹¹ Andrew Bosworth, Meta’s Chief Tech Officer, admitted in an internal memo (Murphy 2021) that moderation in the Metaverse “on any meaningful scale is virtually impossible”. The report ‘Metaverse: another cesspool of toxic content’ (2022) developed by the non-profit organisation SumOfUs shows, among many other alarming data, how regulated spaces on Horizon Worlds are very limited.

The idea of building spaces of freedom in utopian worlds – even in the anarchist and libertarian matrix – have always been part of the architectural and urban design culture, becoming spatial manifestos of ambitious ideological instances of change.¹² On one hand, the Metaverse, as a blank land yet to be discovered, has the potential to become a free space for creative thought and action, as demonstrated by some early experiences in the field of visual arts for example.¹³ On the other hand, however, the current dynamics in mainstream platforms show how there is a dystopian risk of them becoming places of exclusion and violence for minorities and marginalised groups. News about first Interpol office opening in the Metaverse that aims to ‘combat online crime of any nature’ (Interpol 2022) would seem to propose a scenario where traditional regulatory apparatus, control and state-corporate surveillance (Zuboff, 2019) tools will try to reproduce themselves, to a greater or lesser extent, also in virtual cities.

Another scenario could be, instead, the multiplication of meta-worlds created for specific communities as a protective response in an unsafe arena. Is that already the case of Qtopia¹⁴ which presents itself as “the first Metaverse by and for the LGBTQ+ community”. As stated on their website “the Qtopia Metaverse aims to provide an inclusive virtual space for the LGBTQ+ community, friends and allies to connect, while giving back to LGBTQ+ causes. Qtopia is being created with an emphasis on equality, diversity and sustainability.” In this way Metaverse’s potential to create an infinite multiverse could lead to a fragmented socio-spatial scenario, built over different identities in a sort of a virtual identitarian panarchy. The question is how such an anti-enlightenment and anti-modernist bubble virtual landscape, taking up again Sloterdijk’s metaphor,¹⁵ could be governed and designed to avoid a dystopian scenario.

Towards a radical project for virtual cities

¹¹ The trilogy written by German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk deals with the human conception of inhabited spaces. The three volumes are entitled Bubbles (1998), Globes (1999) and Foams (2004).

¹² In this respect as well, the radical architecture of the 1960s and 1970s was emblematic. In France, the G.I.A.P. (Group International d’Architecture Prospective): Paul Maymont, Yona Friedman, Walter Jonas, and Nicolas Schöffer. In Italy, Superstudio and Archizoom Associati. In the United Kingdom, Archigram. In Japan, the Metabolism movement including Kenzo Tange and Arata Isozaki.

¹³ Cf. Federica Patti (2023) ‘Performatività postumana e dinamiche del Metaverso: A Matter of eXperience.’

¹⁴ See: <https://alphaverse.com/qtopia/#>.

¹⁵ Sloterdijk (2015), quoting Jakob von Uexküll’s reflections on the foundations of theoretical biology, states: “it was a mistake to believe that the human world constituted a space shared by all living beings. Every living creature has its own particular space that is as real as the space proper to human beings. This perspective offers us a completely new view of the universe as something that does not simply consist of a soap bubble that we have inflated to such a size that it goes beyond our horizons, assuming infinite proportions, but rather is made up of millions of distinctly distinct bubbles that overlap and intersect everywhere.”

Glossy contemporary utopias or dystopias, what are these new virtual cities? The construction of 'better' cities and 'better' worlds has always obsessed designers and urban planners (although who defined what better is, for whom and how it would be realised remained obscured). The digital field gives us this possibility but it would seem to re-propose, at least on mainstream big tech platforms, well-rooted imaginaries and issues of contemporary neo-liberal cities.

Early experiences in the Metaverse highlight dynamics of exclusion and state-corporate surveillance as well as the intrusive reach of marketing that uses adaptive algorithms to personalise artificial intimacy and the perpetuation of domination imaginaries (Patti 2023). At the same time, the great powers "of finance and big brands are already colonising the dynamics, imaginaries and very essence of digital virtuality" (Ivi) and re-proposing an advanced, extractivist, neocolonialist,¹⁶ and unequal techno-capitalist vision. Seems clear that Metaverse virtual cities pose ethical questions of inclusion and decentralisation, of norms, rights and values, of economic, social and, last but not least, ecological sustainability and equity, which must be addressed immediately. The advent of the Metaverse, a fundamental shift in today's notion of digital presence, calls for serious reflection on the need for new imaginaries on the digital field, a radical 'politics of the imagination' (Didi-Hubermann 2010), as some activists, artists and designers have just begun to do.¹⁷ Also in the architectural and planning disciplines.

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¹⁶ On this topic see for example: <https://longreads.tni.org/digital-colonialism-the-evolution-of-us-empire#>.

¹⁷ See: <http://meta-manifesto.com/>.

Decolonize this Dystopia! Wealth Pollution on the Hudson River

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<https://urbanac.city/fisher>

Introduction

Pier 52 along New York's Hudson River doesn't exist. Yet, it has a phantasmic presence in the form of David Hammons' art installation *Day's End*—a skeletal recreation of the pier's former dimensions that haunts the luxuryscape along the river. The piece is hardly noticeable and probably appears to most passersby as an infrastructural relic of an earlier economic regime. The installation contrasts sharply with the ostentatious and hypervisible Little Island a block to the north. Little Island is a cutting-edge futurepark rising out of the river on mushrooming concrete stems—the hallucination of billionaire brand mogul Barry Diller. Little Island exemplifies the contemporary urban economy premised on the ocular capture of pre-designed experiences. This essay frames such architecture as a breed of wealth pollution that has enclosed the city in glossy Instagram panoramas and ushered in a dystopic paralysis of imagination.

The High Line, a much lauded above-ground park laid atop former rail lines, serves as a spine connecting Little Island at 14th street to the Hudson Yards at 34th. At the center of the Hudson Yards is the Vessel sculpture tower, the shimmering apogee of neoliberal asphyxiation. This stretch of New York's west side is a contiguous rubbish bin of excess wealth; the result of billionaires attempting to build a parallel dimension of immaculate visual inoculation. This High Line corridor exemplifies current ways of seeing predicated on making the future unimaginable. "[T]he only future is intensification of the present" (Colebrook 2020, 358). The future cannot be imagined because it has already invaded the present. The future is no longer a possibility, but an actuality. And it's actually quite depressing.

Wealth Pollution

"Matter out of place," the famous definition of pollution by Mary Douglas, suggests that wealth pollution is wealth in the wrong place; wealth that is poorly, toxically, or dangerously distributed. Wealth pollution has become official policy in New York, beginning subtly in the 1980s and accelerating in the past two decades. The goal has been "to create a city that relied almost exclusively on finance, insurance, and real estate" (Checker 2020, 93). The city is sustained by the wealth leaking out of billionaires. Thus, the city is increasingly designed for leaky billionaires.

While what is considered "out of place" or "in place" from one society to the next is highly variable, wealth pollution often entails "turning everyone's [public] space into someone's profit" (Stein 2019, 14). Some might think that stacking \$200 million worth of shiny steel in the middle of the Hudson Yards (i.e., the Vessel) is an appropriate place for excess wealth. However, if the four people who jumped off the contraption to their deaths (in one year) are any indication, this matter is disturbingly

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out of place.

Often pollution is conceived as scattered litter, overflowing landfills, or spilled contaminants. Pollution is matter inconsiderately strewn about. Objects like the Vessel or Little Island would seem to represent the opposite—the coalescing of resources into a singular meticulous design. Such well-ordered places are often venerated as cultural achievements, the mastery of humanity over the unrelenting tide of entropic disintegration. On Manhattan's west side, however, the architectural flamboyance is quite precisely the leakage of wealth—i.e., wealth inconsiderately oozing out from the botoxified pores of billionaires.

The perverse inequality inherent to capitalization should be shielded from public view by the immense shame of those drowning in excessive wealth. As garbage cans for the unnecessary and useless wealth generated by unending economic growth, billionaires should be embarrassed by their filth. You'd think the rich would be too humiliated to flaunt the planet's obscene excess waste. Rather than shamed into seclusion, though, billionaires today parade around cities leaving distasteful trails of unwanted wealth in urban spaces.

While the aesthetic of this pollution varies, it usually induces despair and dejection (as evidence by the high suicide rate among those exposed to the Hudson Yards). Not only are monuments like Little Island or the Vessel much more ecologically damaging than the scattered coffee cups and candy wrappers that litter actually lived-in parts of a city, they are also psychologically devastating. As is well-documented (Pickett & Wilkinson 2010), greater inequality correlates with greater unhappiness. Those in urban centers, then, who are surrounded by the fiscal obesity of dilapidated billionaires are constantly reminded that something is amiss in their society. While one almost pities the superrich for absorbing all the world's unnecessary extra money, their reckless suicide machines and floating eco-malls remind us of their degeneracy.

This carelessness makes cities increasingly expensive, to the point that many of those less soiled with wealth are forced to leave. The High Line makes surrounding spaces uninhabitable. Samuel Stein discusses this transformation of "urban high-rises from 'machines for living in' to machines for money laundering. . . cities have seen their housing prices balloon over 50 percent in the past five years" (2019, 35). Cities are being transformed into holograms—two-dimensional illusions of cities. The reduction of the city to a backdrop for amateur photoshoots suffocates the serendipity of urban life. Researchers of complexity suggest that the confluence of diverse historical trajectories is what generates vibrancy and life. Coating cities in an epoxy of wealth kills the vagrant bacterial histories that breed a city's organic novelties.

Decolonize this Dystopia

In *L'Arrière-pays* (The Hinterlands), Yves Bonnefoy equates utopia with bountiful possibility. This suggests that dystopia is the elimination of possibility. Possibilities are imaginary (i.e., not actual). A world without possibilities is a world without imagination. This is the character of the micro-dystopia on Manhattan's west side. It is a city's gaps and cracks that incubate imagination, but the narrow linear High Line has no cracks. The High Line imposes a teleological imagination, an inability to imagine a world outside the curated path of the park's future (leading straight to the Vessel). There are no crevices (physical or metaphorical) into which the imagination can sneak, (im)possibilities can foment. This is modernity's predicament—not just the addiction to progress, but the inability to conceive of a future (or any time) outside the narrative of progress. Dystopia is a collision with the end of ideas.

Violence often accompanies the dystopian inability to think outside a narrow trajectory. Indeed, this is what Hannah Arendt's banality of evil suggests. For Arendt, what had become banal was "the failure

to think" (Butler 2011, 280). What is evil is not the normalization of mass-murder, but the normalization of unthinking. Dystopia is the suppression of imagination through normalization. This normalization induces a violent unseeing. The wealth pollution of Manhattan's west side impedes cognitive wandering. It can only be looked at. It cannot be thought about. Thinking about the toxic spatial configurations at the Hudson Yards induces self-destructive urges. Violence is wrought upon thought. In this dystopia, it hurts to think.

Dystopias common to science-fiction can be misleading. They depict jarring ruptures from the current world—the barren hellscape of *Mad Max*, the cyber-slime of *The Matrix*, the gluttony of *Wall-E*. These worlds are sufficiently distanced from present conditions that we're aware we don't reside in them. But dystopia is slow. Less common in dystopian imagery is the normalization of dystopic conditions. The inhabitants of *Mad Max* may not even know they reside in a dystopia. Their dystopia has been normalized. Advertisers are always capable of selling worse scenarios.

If we've slipped into a dystopia, how would we know? To 19th century transcendental-romantics is today's glossy ecocidal architecture dystopic? Dystopias are often written from the present to describe a future that laments how good things were in a past. And usually that past is our present. Thus, can dystopias only be placed in the non-present? Is Manhattan's west side dystopian precisely because it is not present—a plasticated post-card from the future? The Hudson Yards has exceeded the present and already resides in the end of the world (Schwartz 2022)?

One should always ask, "whose dystopia?" As many writers have pointed out, for most the world's inhabitants the world already ended with colonialism, "for the native people of the Americas, the end of the world already happened—five centuries ago" (Viveiros de Castro & Danowski 2018, 191). If utopia is considered a world without exploitation and indignity, colonialism seems precisely engineered to realize dystopia, pursuing maximal exploitation and indignity.

Glassy and Ghostly

Between the post-war industrial bustle and today's selfie-economy, the Hudson River served as a place of errantry (Glissant 1990) where city-dwellers could flee (or at least momentarily hide from) the churn of colonial capitalism. The piers were the cracks and crevices that generate new ways of seeing and thinking. Whether the voids opened up by Gordon Matta-Clark's anarchitectural displacements (see the original 1975 *Day's End*) or the gaping photography of Alvin Baltrop, those traversing such spaces are forced to think, forced to see different worlds, as opposed to the teleological imagination enforced on today's west side. In discussing the work of Baltrop, Jack Halberstam has championed architecture as an organic process (2022). Conversely, the timelessness of the Vessel makes it abiotic, unable to age, decay, or learn.

Errant spaces have increasingly been foreclosed in global cities over the past two decades. Today, there is no place to get lost. There is no place to get in trouble. As Melissa Checker documents, abandoned lots in New York's East Village during the 1980s were transformed into vibrant community gardens. "[L]ow-income New Yorkers reclaimed [lots]—as encampments, as sites of protest and of celebration, and as DIY gardens" (2020, 206). Frustratingly, this non-commercial vitality ultimately contributed to making such areas increasingly valuable, and thus unaffordable for those that vitalized them.

As can be read into the absent Pier 52 and its ghost, *Day's End*, there's always remorse for what will not exist. But it's important not to over-romanticize a past which held us as its future. The virtue of cities is that every generation gets to live them their own way. Places you like might disappear, but only dead things last forever. The inorganic future being constructed on the west side is an effort by wealth polluters to impose eternal lifelessness on the city. This architecture is desperately lacking in

“aesthetic empathy” (Rizvi 2015). As we have seen, this lack of empathy induces self-harm and feelings of despair, as though the future doesn’t want you.

Glossy and Ghastly

Crucial for normalizing luxury despair is the marketing–industrial–complex. The trick is to make the public think it wants to live in dystopia, to induce enough anxiety about the trajectory of the future that the derangement of the present seems amenable. To accomplish this in New York, wealth pollution has adopted the language of sustainability, beautification, and the “greening” of the city. Luxury colonization is conducted in the vernacular of environmental paternalism. But wealth pollution isn’t clean or beautiful, it’s simply an aesthetic that looks good in an investment portfolio. To borrow Achille Mbembe’s phrase, it’s an “aesthetics of vulgarity.”

The less living that takes place in these dystopian spaces the less their property value declines. Sadly, living is inseparable from aging and decay, but abiotic holograms don’t age (i.e., decline in property value). To this end, “The High Line’s major donors . . . wanted the park to retain an air of sophistication, so they made sure its design did not include spaces for children to play” (Checker 2020, 75). The stochastic wiggles of children could threaten the homeostasis of forever wealth.

Is the glossy sheen of today’s ecocide meant to distract us with its sparkle? Does Little Island serve as a kind of photocall roll-drop (those branded backgrounds that celebrities pose in front of when photographed on the red carpet)? There’s no future beyond the photoshoot? The ocular temporality of paparazzi cameras is compressed into a shiny surface that makes it impossible to see around capitalism’s future. Much like posing celebrities, this dystopia is designed to be looked at but not seen.

Rather than protest this wealth pollution, all we seem to do is take its picture. Contemporary cities are designed for social media posts—looks, likes, and rapid scrolling. Architecture like the Vessel captures and incarcerates the eye, preventing observers from seeing any future outside the glow of perpetual wealth accumulation. How can we look away? In Manhattan’s holographic screenscape it’s awkward to be caught looking at nothing. But there’s nothing to see here. It’s a dystopia of looking; a seamless veneer of omnidirectional glances. Exiting this end of the world requires closing the lens and seeing through the nothing. From this optical hollow, imagination can be rewired to see derailed possibilities that are out of line . . . the High Line, specifically.

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Through the Lens of the Glossy Urban Dystopias

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In the current post-crises, post-pandemic (and post-political) conjuncture, the future is often portrayed cladded with potential emergencies and disasters. Post-disaster films and novels have created numerous imaginaries of dystopic futures – some eerily familiar. Similarly, critical theorists have highlighted the rising tendencies of governments and institutions to use future emergencies in order to justify further securitization, pacification coercive governmentalities and inequalities/injustices (Anderson, 2017). If we also consider the current increase of future research (and studies), then one might argue that the future is here in the present (especially since the present seems an untenable situation to deal with or to change).

Prominently, this present–future substantiates through discourses and representations which incorporate present and looming crises and emergencies as well as their often-prescribed modalities of resolution and avoidance (Jeffrey & Dyson, 2021). Yet, simultaneously this present–future also substantiates through alluring spatial imaginaries that portray forthcoming (urban) transformations as an attractive future possibility for the spectators/inhabitants (us).

Urban, spatial imaginaries, as discourses and as representations have extensive histories for being used political technologies for ‘managing Otherness’ and for achieving consensus. E. Said (2003), D. Gregory (2004, building on Said’s work), Bialasiewicz et al. (2007) and many others have greatly illustrated how imagined geographies and spatial imaginaries legitimize imperialist and colonial interventions and violence (over those represented as Others) as well as prescribe internal and external ‘enemies’ – often people not conforming to such imaginaries, or not fitting with the economic and social model behind them – and the strategies for their pacification and/or expulsion.

While geographic imaginations of Otherness, of (in)securities and emergencies and of managing a ‘dangerous’ future have prevailed in theoretical / analytical explorations, rather limited interest has been shown for urban imaginaries of the present – future, that neither form the landscape of utopian/dystopian fictions not refer to better or lesser-known discussions about models of the ideal city.

Dystopias have often reflected conscious and unconscious social fears and anxieties, provided critical commentaries – even warnings – about the world to come as well as about the problems and the failings of the present. Thus, they substantially rely on imaginaries of emergencies, of disasters and of diverse forms of oppression (among others). Yet, as is often written and discussed, oppression doesn’t solely come from repressive regimes or violence and authoritarianism; it also comes through delimiting interpretations of the ‘necessary’ and the ‘attractive’, ‘the good life’, the ‘ideal city’ and ‘the perfect human’ (among others) that inherently privilege certain social groups, ideologies and practices over others who are oppressed or even annihilated. Discourses and representations, as ‘regimes of truth’

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(Foucault, (2003[1997])), legitimate but crucially 'naturalize' these representations in politics and in the social and spatial imaginaries (Hall, 1997).

There lies our interest in the significations of alluring or glossy dystopias: on the pivotal role that spatial imaginaries of urban transformations, and of 'new urban worlds', play in framing and in legitimizing possibilities of urban futures and on the 'naturalization' of the prescribed futures as the best possible scenario, without challenging the overt or covert repercussions that such future transformations might entail. Or in other words in colonizing both urban life and urban imaginaries.

When we turn our attention to the urban, commonly, narratives of urban crises and decline come together with narratives and representations of regeneration, rejuvenation and rebranding of the cities 'in crisis' trying to convince about a better promised future – if only. And this better future is cultivated via spectacular, alluring, enticing images of urban phantasmagorias where 'problems' (people, neighbourhoods, politics) have been 'photoshopped out'; erased.

Contrary to the post-apocalyptic dystopic futures, these 'glossy attractive urban dystopias' do not warn about the dangers that a given socio-political trajectory might entail. Rather, in our hyper-spectacularized times, these 'glossy dystopias' pacify anxieties by providing a 'picture-perfect future' which becomes imprinted into social imaginaries with a positive – albeit unquestioned – signification. Even more so, their 'unchallenged' attractiveness does not solely legitimize and naturalize the proposed representations of the future but simultaneously 'normalizes' both the visible and the invisibilised (those excluded and erased from it) but also tends to limit, or disallow, or even remove the possibilities for articulating critique and alternative futures.

So, for whom is this glossy dystopic future planned and who is excluded from it?

Which discriminations, inequalities and injustices are 'normalized' for the desired future to materialize?

How are these glossy dystopias constructed, which politics do they necessitate, and which actors facilitate and promote them?

And how can these glossy dystopias be challenged and countervailed?

Dorreen Massey has offered a conceptualization of the spatial "as an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification" with places (but also 'cultures' and 'societies' as she writes referring to Hall, 1995) being "imagined as particular articulations of these social relations, including local relations 'within' the place and those many connections which stretch way beyond it. And all these embedded in complex, layered, histories".

By naming these imaginary spatialities as glossy dystopias we wish to interrogate and illuminate the underlying relations of power, exclusion and oppression that hide behind these 'beautified' dystopias and aestheticized futures. Therefore, we perceive glossy urban dystopias as an analytical lens that allows us to illuminate these legitimized, naturalized and unchallenged social and spatial urban imaginaries that prescribe our 'improved' cities, neighbourhoods and lives, while obscuring the inherent discriminations, inequalities and dispossessions they might entail.

Glossy urban dystopias can be perceived both as an analytical 'terrain' and as a methodological vantage point. Rather than suggesting one method of critical analysis, critique or praxis it wishes to be embedded in a multiplicity of methods and approaches which could, potentially, challenge and contest discourses, representations and politics of and for urban redevelopment, renewal, and renaissance, presenting us alluring, but not alive, places where the complexity and the inequalities are just hidden as solved. They actually produce an image that looks at us, portraying a 'desired' or 'desirable' future in which 'we' can happily be without others; others have been erased; invisibilized from the im-

age; and often violently displaced and excluded from the experienced reality when the image gains life (materializes and becomes embodied)

Finally, we wish to highlight the potential that the critique of such glossy urban dystopias bear for counter-praxis; for cultivating counter-rationalities that may, in the future, challenge the normalization of dominant worldviews and politics and hidden dimensions of power-relations that reproduce injustices and inequalities and restrict the articulation of counter-imaginaries (social, spatial, political etc).

In this sense, glossy or alluring dystopias may work provocatively by allowing for or by developing a counter-imaginary that illustrates the hidden, invisibilized oppressions of the glossy future imaginary.

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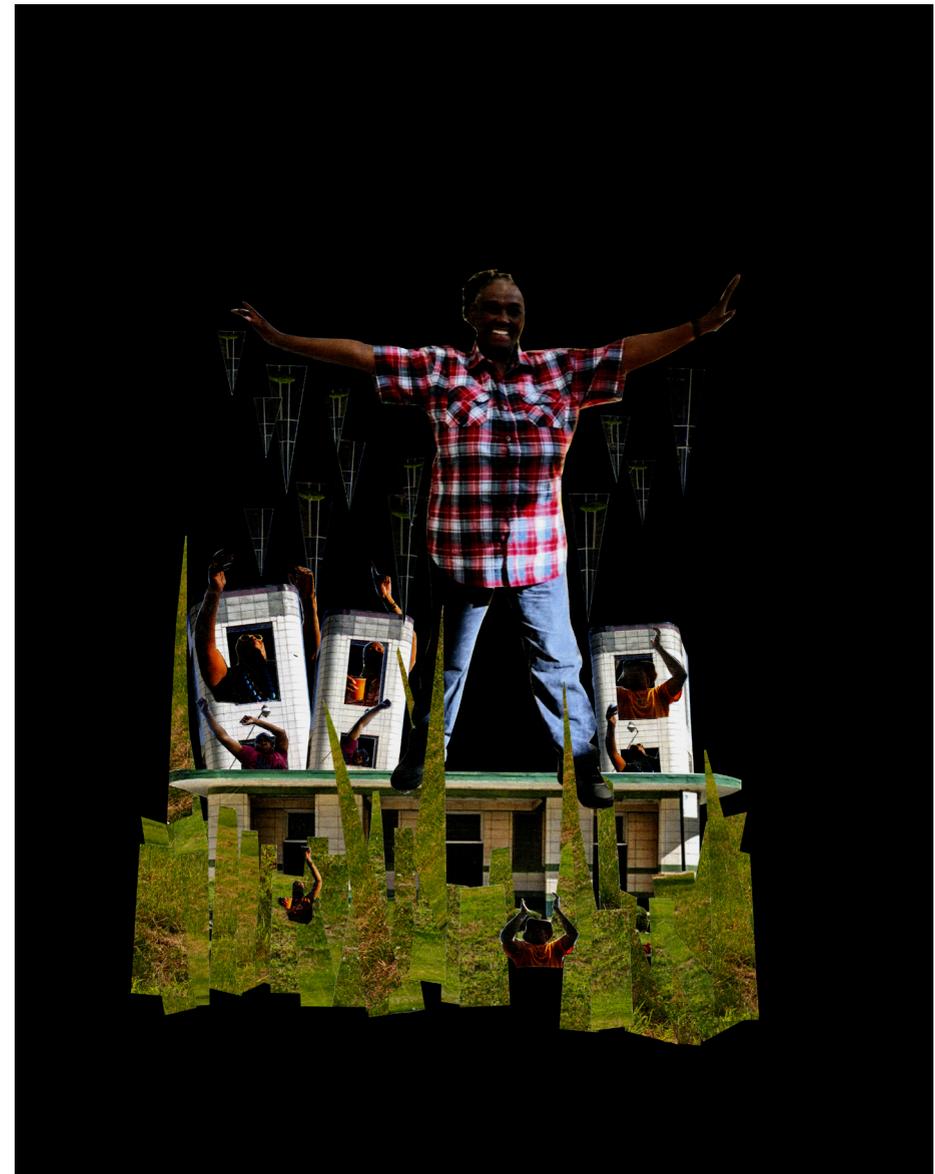
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Io Squaderno 66

Glossy Urban Dystopias

edited by // Penny Koutrolikou and Cristina Mattiucci

Guest Artist // urbanAC



Io Squaderno is a project by Andrea Mubi Brighenti, Cristina Mattiucci & Andrea Pavoni.

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In the next issue:
Interstices, Liminality and Boundaries

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