



once upon **a** place

Architecture & Fiction



EDITORS
Pedro Gadanho + Susana Oliveira

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Architecture &
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Presentation

PEDRO GADANHO + SUSANA OLIVEIRA 7

Once Upon a Place

ALBERTO MANGUEL 9

Urban Fictions

COLIN FOURNIER 19

I – UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS

Introduction: Utopias and Dystopias: dreams and nightmares

DIOGO BURNAY 33

Squares and Scares II. A literary journey into the architectural imaginary

JONATHAN CHARLEY 37

Hugh Ferriss: Visions of Utopia

ALEXANDRA AI QUINTAS 51

When the City Lays in the Shadow of the Plan: ideas for a method of intervention in the consolidated city built space

TERESA VEIGA DE MACEDO 61

II – STORIES FROM HISTORY

Introduction: EDUARDO CÔRTE-REAL 71

Gendering “Fantasia”: Architectural/Literary Creation/Procreation in Filarete’s *Libro Architectonico*

SEVIL ENGINSOY EKINCI 73

'I would like to live forever in this happy place with my divine Polia': <i>Hypnerotomachia Poliphili</i> (1499) as architectural metaphor of desire FANI MOUMTZIDOU	83
--	----

The Secret Lives of Buildings: An Exercise in Building Stories EDWARD HOLLIS	99
---	----

III – CITY NARRATIVES

Introduction: GABRIELA VAZ-PINHEIRO	115
---	-----

Stranger than Fiction ALEXANDER EISENSCHMIDT	117
---	-----

The Physiognomist and The Rag-Picker. Reading the City-as-Text and Writing the Text-as-City PINAR BALAT	127
---	-----

Urban Scenarios: Gone Vacant, Virtual, and Violent GRAÇA PROENÇA CORRÊA	135
--	-----

IV – LITERARY SPACES

Introduction: VÉRONIQUE PLESCH	145
--------------------------------------	-----

The Struggle for Representation. An Architect Inside Mark Z. Danielewski's <i>House of Leaves</i> STYLIANOS GIAMARELOS	149
--	-----

The Double-Bind of Fictional Lives: Architecture and Writing in George Perec's <i>Life, A User's Manual</i> J. KENT FITZSIMONS	159
--	-----

The Bernhardian <i>Cachectonica</i> : Figures of Architectural Discomfort and Distress in Thomas Bernhard's fiction JOÃO BORGES DA CUNHA	169
--	-----

V – ARCHITECTURE AND CINEMA

Introduction: JOSÉ NEVES	177
--------------------------------	-----

Mapping Interstices: understanding urban conditions through the lived experience of societal margins in contemporary film NICK DUNN	179
---	-----

Filming Budapest: Visions of the City Between Cinema and Politics LEVENTE POLYAK	189
---	-----

Reel Houses of Horror: emotional smooth space between horror film characters and architecture RILEY TRIGGS	199
--	-----

VI – VISUAL/GRAPHIC FICTIONS

<i>Introduction: MARIA JOSÉ GOULÃO</i>	209
Staging Memories: The Imagined City through the <i>Mise-en-scène</i> of Photography YINHUA CHU	213
Architecture's New Worlds SEAN PICKERSGILL	225
Obsession Accelerator JIMENEZ LAI	239

VII – SCIENCE FICTION ARCHITECTURES

<i>Introduction: Dreamt-of Golem</i> RUI ZINK	251
The Critique of the Architecture of Gated Communities through J. G. Ballard's Literature ZEYNEP TUNA ULTAV + NUR ÇAĞLAR	255
Welcome 2D Future – Cinema, Comics and the transmediatic construction of the City of the Future [Some random notes] LUIS MIGUEL LUS ARANA	265
The Vibra Sequencer INÊS LOPES MOREIRA	279

VIII – DESIGN FROM FICTION

<i>Introduction: JANE RENDELL</i>	291
Metamorphosis. On the Role of Fiction in Architectural Education GIJS WALLIS DE VRIES	297
Architectural Prescription: Investigating the Balance between Real and Imagined KLASKE MARIA HAVIK	307
Making through Destruction: Disorderly Architecture and Vandalism IRENE HWANG + JOHN SZOT	315
<i>Epilogue: Looking at Place: Thoughts on Visual and Written Form</i> FRANCISCO AGOSTINHO	323
Contributors	329
Acknowledgements	343



In recent times, the role of virtual and fictional architectures in movies, *photomontage* and videogames has been repeatedly emphasized. Not only they are the subject of more theoretical essays, but they are also to be found in the core practice of many architects, graphic and cyber artists, photographers, designers or filmmakers. All of them make use of strategies and approaches easily defined as mostly experimental and artistic in their effective enactment of utopias, or heterotopias, “in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted”.¹

In various different ways, these “imagined cities” are also at the center of the reflections and graphic work that constitute this chapter, perhaps one of the most challenging and experimental of this book. In fact, the relationship between fiction and architecture is here the object of attention from different authors and artists, that make use not ~~use not~~, or not exclusively, of theory or literature, but also of visual and graphic devices.

All three articles, although totally distinct in their scope, have a point in common: they stress that “fictional architectural worlds that are fundamentally visually different from our current world” (Sean Pickersgill) are taking a growing place in theoretical discussions on architecture, as well as on the arts, media, cybernetics and entertainment world.

Urban life, movement and memories intermingle in the photographic projects of YinHua Chu, who, based on her own experience of travelling between different

cities, deploys various modes of *mise-en-scène*, incorporating elements of the public spaces of cities and mingling them with her own personal memories, in order to create an "imagined city" that is part experience, part personal memory, part fantasy.

As a visual artist with a penchant for the photographic medium, she sees herself as a modern *flâneur*, "a transitional phenomenon connecting the present with the past and the future". Basically, her body of work tries to observe how memories may interact with the physical environment by means of photographic activity; she does so by exploring the ideas of familiarity and foreignness in different cities and by trying to recreate a certain sense of intimacy in a hostile territory. Her awareness of the urban landscape is not far from Guy Debord's psychogeography.

She seeks to provide a new dimension to urban geography, using notions of fragment, detail, slice, transnationality, fluidity of time and space. Assuming the role of a urban wanderer, she recreates a kind of *locus amoenus* through escapism, but when trying to avoid what she calls "the catastrophe of the present", she does so by turning herself not to nature, but to urban and domestic landscapes that trigger fantasies and imagination, manipulate a ready-made memory and make use of her subjective experience.

Sean Pickersgill, on the other hand, places his reflections at the intersection of digital aesthetics, game environments and architecture; he is concerned with the philosophical aspects of representations of fictional architecture, understanding the status of this fictionality and its relation to architecture. His article deals with cities, spaces and topologies of computer games, and specifically those created by the graphic artist Daniel Dociu.

Finally, Jimenez Lai aims to explore hypothetical scenarios of experimental architecture in his short stories, which also consider the relationship between fiction, architecture and the distortion of facts. He argues that unmanaged distortion is sometimes a desirable condition in the practice of architecture.

His manga-style graphic stories, that concentrate ideas about scale, projection, perception, preferences and uniqueness, offer a fresh point of view over many architectural problems, some of them tested out afterwards as physical installations.

As it is repeatedly pointed out in the following pages, the relationship between the architectural imagination and the real world is undeniable, although it may unfold in many different ways. There seems to be little doubt for me that Michel

Foucault's *heterotopias*, in their role of creating "a space of illusion, that exposes every real space", or "a space that is other, another real space", are still at the core of our times and of our visual culture.

It is well known that, of all the possible heterotopias, Foucault considered the ship the heterotopia *par excellence*. The articles in this chapter remind us, as he also asserted, that "in civilizations without boats, dreams dry up, espionage takes the place of adventure, and the police take the place of pirates."²

NOTES

¹ Foucault, Michel, "Of Other Spaces", in Mirzoeff, Nicholas (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed., London and New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 231.

² Foucault, Michel, "Of Other Spaces", p. 236.