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## The Utopian City: A Boundary of Filmic Reality

**Abstract:** This article aims to clarify the way in which we interpret the relations that are established between immediate and filmic reality (which film generates) and how important the act of knowing is in setting the boundaries of perceptible reality as well as in remarking the potential challenges that these types of fiction, able to juggle with the significations of reality but also with those that surpass its limits, amplify under the circumstances of a dichotomic relation. The existence of boundaries as a support of a singular experience within a construction such as the utopian city will play an important role in supporting the shaping of the possibilities of reality, in leveling them. In the context of utopian cinematography, the new significations that film establishes through discourse, regarded as rectifiable experiences, make a frequent place such as the city, a space within which the reality is resemanticized in a relation that is not in the least conjunctural with the lack of an identity, of a precise contour, of a simulacrum.

**Keywords:** reality, filmic, city, utopia, boundary, identity

### Introduction

The need for cinematography to go from shedding light on reality to a thorough reflexive radiography of the image through which the movie is not recorded as a discourse on a film, but rather operationalized as an image of the image of the immediacy it projects, managing to set free the effect of psychological vexation from its moral packaging (Benjamin 2008, 125), can serve as a foothold in identifying the tensions that appear and develop at the boundary between the two realities.

Cinematography produces codes, it generates types of discourse that have as a main purpose the generation of change within the social space. Obviously, cinematographic utopias are not an exception, and in addition to that, they also function programmatically to the disadvantage of the viewer. They constrain the latter to adopt this type of discourse as a personal one, capable to trigger an identity crisis of the utopias through the manner in which the community understands and chooses to relate to the new ideal place. The filmic reality that the movie builds and then delivers can be

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borrowed and reconstructed as a personal immediacy. The construction of cinematographic utopias is possible only when there is complicity. For instance, the realization of a relationship of trust in the image as a subordinate to the immediate will trigger a process in which the viewer accepts the movie as reality.

However, let us not neglect that utopian discourses are the ones that deny immediate reality through all the means they have. Being imaginary and ideal in nature, the utopian fact loses its substantiality. Reality is thus the space that opens up between existence and essence, that is between ineffability and language, self-standing and with a contextual presence, with a solid, unlimited substratum (Campagna 2018, 115). Reality is that available place of our existential experience of the fact of being in the world, in a Heideggerian sense. Through a programmatic process of deconstruction, the false secondariness of filmic reality can be transformed into a possible plurality. The utopian reality can only be established through ontological reduction, being placed in an uncertain dimension. The imaginary reality as a mechanism is built by bracketing social reality, and the space and time in which it is transposed must know no other form of alteration. Cinematographic utopias can only be ontologically consistent if the individuals can disregard the “here” and “now” and the new realities will be able to appear as ontological attitudes before appearing as aesthetical ones. The difficulty of the ontological status of the probable realities<sup>1</sup> can be understood by appealing to experience. The reflected image quality, of a double specular, the dualism of utopian structures, affects every element of the alternate utopian universe (Braga 2015, 32).

Reality represents the legitimate connection, the prolonged correlation of the present, while irreality is the sudden and discontinuous emergence into consciousness, updating itself continuously and thus becoming virtual, a probability, a secondariness (Deleuze 2005, 54-55). The distinction between possible realities is always differentiated, forgery represents neither the consequence of an error, nor that of a confusion, but more than that, it is a force that makes reality undecidable, undeterminable (Bergson 1969). Through cinematography, we continuously access the effect of reality in a first instance where filmic reality carves out the image of the immediate reality projected as an image conceived by others for the viewers, who are mere consumers of the presented reality. The boundaries of filmic reality are tied to the authenticity of the discourse and the effect of reality it produces, the extent in which this social convention, animated by new architectural structures such as the city, and language, manages to absorb everyday reality and present it not as an analogue of authenticity, but rather through perceptual means and to define a corporal reality involved in space and time, a reality which engages the viewer as part of its common world.

Filmic reality must not be defined by the attribute of verisimilitude, but it goes beyond *appearing as reality* and is defined by *feeling like reality* (Rushton 2011, 87). Immediate reality is consistent and it becomes possible, while filmic reality is alternative, but it is perceptible compared to the literary imaginary. Filmic reality is adopted, in Stieglerian terms, as an objective reality (Stiegler 2011, 98). It is important to mention that the cinematographic discourse, although it requires to be assimilated as reality, must also be regarded as an exposition only because the discourse always sets the boundaries of reality, and change itself will be perceived as reality, as a similarity to the self in immediacy.

This accession beyond immediacy can be synonymous with overcoming social limitations, filmic reality transforming into an alternative that is closer to myth than to progress, which will rearrange the imaginary by favoring the self-sufficiency of an ideal space-time where filmic reality will keep symbols such as the urban trying to exploit factuality in order to subdue it (Wunenburger 1979).

### **The utopian city and the boundaries of filmic reality**

Reality is subject to forces which are in perpetual change, and within reality there can be possibilities we do not yet know, while in utopias, these surprise possibilities do not occur, mental representations are found in human consciousness, and therefore the images and relationships which can be represented in utopias only depend on the mechanism of thought (Mannheim 1954, 86).

The act of cinematography will always be connected to the *esse est percipi* principle, and the objective world will, for the most part, have the tendency to dissolve into subjective structures of perception, while being supported by cinematographic techniques which will trace ambivalent boundaries between perceived and represented reality. The utopian filmic manages to detach particular actions that the cognitive exercise generates in comparison with the affective one.

The utopian urban has distinguished itself from the very beginning as having a hierarchized and original architecture, which is most of the times oriented towards the cancellation of individual actions, proposing itself as a hygienic, transparent space while also missing the anticipating capacity and thus risking to remain only a critical instrument of the utopian space, generating an identity crisis within the filmic beyond the borders of which divergence occurs, and the utopian city takes on the meanings and attributes of a random space of refuge. Cinematographic space and time reveal the concrete texture in which events and experiences are fixated. The cinematographic act must be regarded as an act of overcoming the boundaries of subjectivity by engaging the gaze (Deleuze 1989, 69-71).

Reality seen as an exact reproduction of the way in which the affective-perceptive system understands concepts is the discursive path towards reality, from *seeing* to *thinking*, from the sensorial to cognition.

Film offers the viewer the intimacy of real spaces<sup>2</sup>. The spaces of the utopian urban can become symbolic phenomena, the places in which historical tensions are discharged. In the words of Walter Benjamin, the urban universe becomes one which technicalizes existence and settles into a dialectical image which has the capacity to repersonalize the city as a place of new forms of knowledge (Benjamin 2021). Authentic experiences can be permuted within the utopian urban by standardizing feelings (Kracauer 1997, 34). Without having forms of spatial and temporal substantiality, the lack of a consistent centrality of the urban, the ambiguity of those who cross it may make the utopian city a territory delimited by pragmatism and illusion. The architectonic physiognomy that is characteristic of the utopian urban does not function in virtue of a personal mechanism, it is described and later reconstructed through those who pass through it. The utopian city does not succeed in transferring itself from an ideal regime to a material one, therefore it self-defines as a sum of the tensions which appear between various forms of manifestation, through the manner in which the experience within it can be remarkable. The physiognomy of the utopian urban constantly changes depending on how the elements of architecture, the objects, and even the individuals frequently lose their coherence and substantiality, by continuously rectifying the operating terms of the limits of the utopian filmic reality.<sup>3</sup>

Within the utopian filmic, the relation to the city is not abstract, but rather sensitive, the place where the experience of the gaze crosses towards the authentic and re-archives the urban space by appealing to memory, deconstructing the city in image and text and potentiating a historical ontology of the city, a dialectic *eikon*. The utopian cinema thus becomes capable of repotentiating this time-as-image that Benjamin described. The utopian urban is dependent on an interrogative function to succeed functioning coherently, and the way in which it is reordered makes it so reality represents a space beyond which everything should be possible.<sup>4</sup> Utopias generate a distancing relationship between the imaginary and reality which threatens the stability of reality (Mannheim 1954, 222). The filmic reality which the utopian urban suggests is subject to forces which have the ability to permanently displace their center of interest, and the constructions which appear within the utopian urban can be seen as a consoling artifice to the misfit individuals, who lack the authentic experience of reality, who live dramas related to the place they occupy socially, but also as an exercise of overcoming boundaries. The impossibility to recognize the attributes of imperfection within the utopian urban is the main attribute which makes the

city within the filmic reality a field of tension, an impersonal space which lacks identity, which cannot subjectively update content. (Ricoeur 1986, 102)

By managing to go beyond the cyclicity of utopias, the city will decompose into symbolic images of time and space, thus generating a paradigmatic crisis within the filmic reality. For instance, this will generate an ample process of permanent reevaluation, identifying the core in personal considerations about the future. A transmutation of the immediacy towards probability will thus be achieved, hence the new reality perceived as veridical will be installed following the instability of certain sectors such as the utopian urban within which factuality and possibility intersect. Sheltered by a precarious idealism, there is a symptomatology specific to the lack of identity of the utopian city, which makes it vulnerable in relation to autonomy and authenticity. The utopian rhetoric of filmic reality can only make sense if it is associated with the architectural technology of the urban, a compliant one which uses the concepts of equality and justice to the point of platitude.

The problem of the dissolution of the identity of filmic reality is tightly connected to the lack of an exact outline that can be traced around the utopian city, and this ambiguity of identity may spark a crisis of those who still preserve and use irreality, experiencing it within the utopic urban and trying to synchronize it with the functions of the imaginary. Unquestionably, the reality of utopias (whether cinematic, literary or religious) would not have been recorded in history had they not had any other purpose than bringing out impossibility. (Putnam 1988, 116)

The resemanticization of reality within the utopian urban will occur constantly as it opens up new, vulnerable, pathways of access which will contribute to the tracing of boundaries as a limit of the identity of this space, unnatural, mechanical, a wall most of the times transparent, erected as a strong symbol of protection against another potential unpredictable imaginary.

## Conclusions

The essential element of cinema is that it has the capacity to capture immediacy, in terms of time and space, further managing to facilitate the understanding of the details of an experience, to normalize the act of image in relation to the gaze (Benjamin 2008). Common elements become original from that moment on, a new ordinary, a semantic introspection of the reality in which the idea that *watching* implies *knowing*, naturally neglecting the technical subterfuges which support the act of looking with the purpose of achieving the transfer of trust to the viewer. The manner clause maintains a distance from the means of knowledge, and in the absence of *I know how*,

the new reality is established and becomes possible at the shelter of the privacy of a process.

The boundaries of filmic reality are thus traced tangentially to knowledge. The depth of real spaces that the movie provides, through the new narrative practices that the complementary realities have, will place the filmic reality in a position of force (Deleuze 1990), by narrating a substantial acoustic and optical universe, generating new architectures which can make probable a self-temporalization of images which determines the gaze to reconceptualize the image (Deleuze 1989). The boundaries that cinematography enforces become important through its very ability to deliver new universes that the viewer may perceive as reality, not a psychological one, but an eminently social one.

The problem of the total illusion of reality is important by the fact that cinematography is able to interrogate, through the means of which it disposes, on the manner in which reality is seen, understood, created, deconstructed, each relation to reality being unique, corresponding to a singular sentence of thinking in terms of cinema. Cinematography is the result of a progressive and intensive extension of perception and of the understanding of reality, an immediacy which, without cutting out fragments of reality, cannot be constituted in a discourse (Bazin 2005, 77-79). Filmic reality is based on the accuracy of the correspondence of a representation with something previous, a preconceived preexistent reality in relation to possibility.<sup>5</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It should not be understood that „probabilism” is only reduced to the existence of cinematically narrative and stylistical practices.

<sup>2</sup> In the movie “Vanilla Sky” (2001, d. Cameron Crowe), the context is created for a polemic debate concerning the concept of authenticity, which is tied to the manner in which the filmic reality is perceived. The movie offers a multitude of concept-surfaces of reality, acceding from the lucid dream to meta-reality by transforming revolutive spaces into a palpable extended immediacy which re-replaces subjects in a satisfying simulacrum, in a present-absent dichotomy. The acceptance of the simulacrum as an operation of depression by replacing the signs of reality and short-circuiting the vicissitudes will create the premise of a real possible process through an operational, programmatic double, in which reality will be given a chance to reproduce itself through cinematography, by liquidating all reference systems (Baudrillard 1994).

<sup>3</sup> In the work “City Light. On the experience of Walter Benjamin”, ch. *Mundus Imaginalis*, Al. Tofan (2014) the concept of a city is repeatedly problematized, the difficulties and instruments with which filmic reality may operate being thus pinpointed.

<sup>4</sup> From the perspective of imaginative representations, *possibility* will operate as a *mimesis* in an interpretation where accepting the conventions of building new realities, in a context of verisimilitude, may generate precise functions for the things which make up the new reality, the utopian urban in our case.

<sup>5</sup> The possibility to perceive immediacy is dependent on an entire conceptual system at Bazin.

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