

## The Future Cities that Were Shaped by Visual Culture of 1980's SCI-FI Movies

**Serkad Hasan Işıkören<sup>a</sup>, N. Derin Işıkören<sup>b</sup>**

a Dr. Near East University, Faculty of Architecture, Department of Architecture, Nicosia, Cyprus

<https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0000-0001-6928-9250>

[serkadhasan.isikoren@neu.edu.tr](mailto:serkadhasan.isikoren@neu.edu.tr)

<sup>b</sup> Assist. Prof. Dr. European University of Lefke, Faculty of Communication, Department of Visual Communication, Lefke, Cyprus

[0000-0002-9246-5096](mailto:0000-0002-9246-5096)

[nisikoren@eul.edu.tr](mailto:nisikoren@eul.edu.tr)

### Abstract

At the turn of the 20th century modernism was its own way. Futurism has its manifesto by expressing of the celebration of the new era. It was underlining the fact that new era should destroy all previous ties of traditionalism and one should turn its head to the developments of industrial revolution. Architecture created its own dynamics by examining the tradition, later combining it with revolution and at the end creating the vocabulary of its own language. As Pioneer architect Le Corbusier illustrated the appearance of feature cities in his sketches some other new art forms were on its way. Meanwhile; cinema as the new art form, visualised and rather prophecised future cities as architects of the new world foreseen the facts of the future appearance of the cities. The aim of this paper is to investigate the effects of the cinema industry of 1980's on future cities and the reflections of three dimensional graphics on architectural facades of the future cities by examining the movie based sci-fi hallucinations that come to be true in today's cities.

**Key words:** Architecture, 3D graphics, Façades, Futurism, Sci- Fi, Cinema

### 1980ler Bilim kurgu filmlerindeki görsel kültürün şekillendirdiği geleceğin Şehirleri

#### Özet

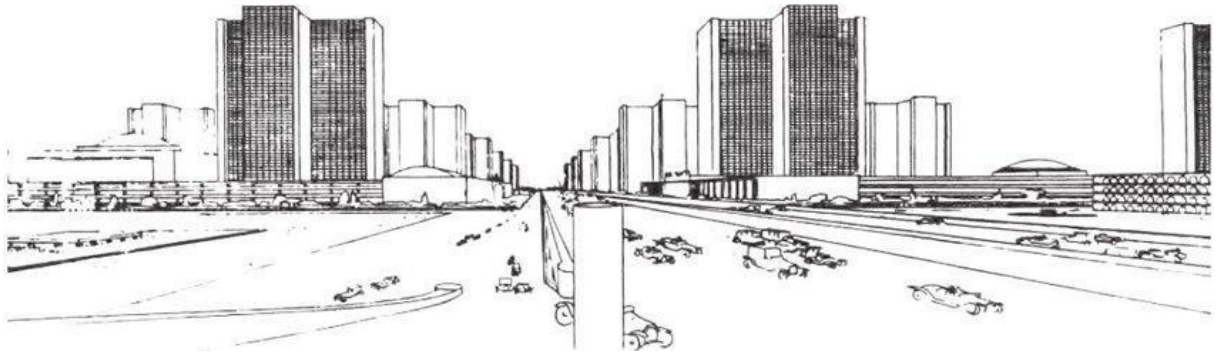
20. yüzyılın başında modernizm tüm uygulamalı sanat alanlarında etkisini göstermiştir. Fütürizm, bu yeni çağı manifestosu ile karşılamıştır. Modern dönem, gelenekçiliğin tüm eski bağlarını yıkması ve yönünü sanayi devriminin gelişmelerine çevirmesi gerektiğinin altını çizmiştir. Mimarlık geleneği inceleyerek ve onu endüstriyel devrimle birleştirerek kendi dilinin söz varlığını oluşturarak kendi dinamiklerini oluşturmuştur. Öncü mimar Le Corbusier, eskizlerinde özellikli şehirlerin görünümünü resmederken, bazı yeni sanat formlarının da önünü açmıştır. Bu sırada; yeni sanat formu olarak sinema, yenedünyanın mimarları olarak geleceğin şehirlerini görselleştirmiş ve sanal bir potansiyel ve öngörü ortaya koyarak şehirlerin gelecekteki olası görünümünü gözler önüne sermiştir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, günümüz kentlerinde gerçeğe dönüşen film temelli bilimkurgu varsayımlarını inceleyerek, 1980'li yılların sinema endüstrisinin geleceğin şehirleri üzerindeki etkilerini ve üç boyutlu grafiklerin geleceğin şehirlerinin mimari cephelerine yansımalarını araştırmaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Mimarlık, 3D Grafikler, Cephe, Gelecekçilik, Bilim- Kurgu, Sinema

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mid-19th century was a turning point of human history as culturally for its drastic and dramatic changes in the previously known life style. It was a total change for the traditional lifestyle of humanity since so-called the Neolithic Revolution. The Neolithic revolution was well known as a transition period from consuming way of life of hunter gatherer societies to productive way of life of settled villager's life of Neolithic period. As all previous changes of lifestyle demand some changes in daily routine of Neolithic Revolution, this new revolution would have its own changes, dynamics and related demands for this upcoming industrial way of life (WEISDORF, Jacob L. 2005). Architectural re-organisation was a certain need for growing industrial cities. Migration, from rural areas to the industrial city centres, multiplied the population within a very short time period, at the end of the century. Consequently to the migration wave, housing facility and facilities related to social needs has increased. In order to solve these needs, new elements and materials has adopted to modernist architecture as mass production factory goods (Roth, L. M. 2018). Moreover at the beginning of 20th century, architecture faculties were already established to educate architects who would shape the modern architecture and related ideas in the near future.

Futurist manifesto underlines this clear distinctive change by getting rid of all traditional ties in between traditional understanding of art and architecture and modern/ technological developments after industrialisation. As a result, architects like Le Corbusier would define future cities in their sketches according to the contemporary needs of the era (Figure 1). Almost at the same time newly developed art form which is science fiction and fantastic literature, cinema foreseen and criticized future cities as human life started become machine based.



**Figure 1:** Drawing of Le Corbusier's proposal for a modern city of three million inhabitants

Jules Verne as a pioneer of science fiction novelists was prophesizing the trip to the moon in 1885 as related movie did the same in 1990. German director Fritz Lang criticized over populated future cities and class difference between poor and rich (symbolic signifier to signify high and low of city scape) in his 1926 movie titled as *Metropolis* and *Modern Times* starring Charlie Chaplin was focused on human as a part of factory as being a part of its machines (Graham, S. 2016). Hence for first phase of science fiction cinema, Abohela suggests;

*“It can be argued that pre1950s cinema’s ‘poetic’ image of the city is dominated by three images: the vertical, lofty and aerial quality of the city as seen in Just Imagine (1930); the Emerald City of The Wizard of Oz (1939)”* (Abohela, I. 2015).

Therefore, examples that were mentioned above from pre 1950's can be seen as "poetic" representations of future city image as it appears in Charles Dickens poetic description of the industrial city of Coketown in his 1845 novel that is known as "Hard Times". (Roth, L. M. 2018). On contrary sci-fi movies after 1950's, create "dystopic" and "utopic" representations of future cities rather than poetic descriptions.

With the developing technology in Cinema industry, 1970's and 1980 was prophesizing the future cities and related technology of today's contemporary life.

## 2. CINEMATOGRAPHIC EXAMPLES

Blade Runner that was directed by Ridley Scott can be seen as the first example of this prediction. The movie depicts the future city of 2019 and the director created a city full of flying cars, monumental and high buildings with hologram surfaces. The architectural façades were covered by three dimensional graphic advertisements. Most important example beside others is called "geisha eating cotton candy" (Figure 2)



**Figure 2:** Geisha eating cotton candy, Blade Runner, 1982

Second example in the chronological order is Akira by Katsuhiro Otomo in 1988. As Blade Runner depicted the futuristic cities, Akira depicted a dystopic city that is called as Neo-Tokyo in the year of 2019 after a mysterious atomic explosion (Figure 3). There is also a clean separation between the old city and modern city which are separated by a bridge. The new city is full of skyscrapers and almost beyond its capacity (De La Iglesia, M. 2018). The exaggerated reflection of technology in these movies is explained by Abouhela, I. M., Dewidar, K. M., & El-Gohary as:

*"Architecture in cyberspace is confronted with the abstraction of virtual space, as well as the intangibility of networks and the ramifications of these invisible connections upon architectural form. There may be a formal side to cyberspace, but it is more ethereal than the industrial language of early science fiction"* (Abouhela, I. M., Dewidar, K. M., & El-Gohary, A.F.2007).

Unlike earlier science-fiction stories that were focused mostly on criticizing the effects of the industrial revolution, later generation science fiction movies were mostly focused on postmodern philosophy and trying shed of light to design future. Abohela argues that;

*“In this film Ridley Scott’s approach was bound and influenced by his own critique of the Post-modern paradigmatic shift which offered a complete vision of a postmodernist Bleak and demanding dystopic future. Although disliked by the audience at the time of its release, contemporary film critics described it as prophetic”* (Abohela, I. 2015).



**Figure 3:** Akira, Katsuhiro Otomo, depiction of future city of Neo Tokyo, 1988

The last example of the decade is actually a trilogy by director Robert Zemeckis. Back to the future movies were reflecting changes of same spot that was used in movie. The movie analyses the comparison of urbanisation or urban development of the same spot “Green Hill Valley” in the years of 1885, 1955, 1985 and 2015. By the way it also fulfils the curiosity of the audience on the idea of time travelling. The second movie “BttF II” depicts the future city of 2015 in the production year of 1989. Same futuristic graphics can be seen in the movie beside flying cars, flying boards and self-wearing clothes that reflects the idea of future technology of the future. 3D Advertisement of another famous horror movie of 1980’s reflected as hologram (Figure 4) as one can experience the idea in daily routine.



**Figure 4:** Back to the future II, Robert Zemeckis, Jaws Advertisement as 3D hologram

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In this article, the methodological basis has been built upon qualitative nature and structured as an analytical comparative image articulation with the documentation of a series of different movie sequences that depicts 3D advertisings on building facades in between 1980-90 and contemporary 3D commercials that takes place in different Asian cities in building facades after 2000's. First group of visuals as being totally imaginary and the second group as being realized and used, has been compared within the theoretical basis of Swiss psychologist and constructivist Jean Piaget "People actively construct their knowledge of the world based on the interactions between their ideas and experiences" (MCLEOD, Saul. 2007).

Within that scope, the contemporary graphical motives that affects the appearance of future cities will be discussed with the comparison: of similarities between past fiction adversary motives versus contemporary adversary reality. This idea of cultural articulation being built one upon another as reality based on imagination will be displayed in this article under the framing of graphic advertisings that affects the facades of buildings in modern cities. The below listed examples will be compared in order to support and prove this idea.

**Table 1.** Visuals of content analyses listed according to comparison groups and date.

	<b>Fictional</b>	<b>Reality</b>
<b>Example1</b>	Blade Runner, 1982	A biennial of Creative Videos
<b>Example2</b>	Akira, 1988	Taikoo Li shopping mall
<b>Example3</b>	Back to the Future, 1989	Final Fantasy Billboard

### 4. REAL FUTURE CITES OF TODAY'S WORLD

It is observable that once was imagination in science fiction movies and books became the practice of life in the cities that people live in. One generation has raised by watching these sci-fi movies and now they live it as practical motive and as a part of their lives. As mentioned by Swiss psychologist and constructivist Jean Piaget "People actively construct their knowledge of the world based on the interactions between their ideas and experiences" (MCLEOD, Saul. 2007). There are other approaches to the notion of the interaction of different areas of idea production. For example, Saussure mentioned the idea of value in a similar way. According to him the value of any unit can only be attributed by the position of the other units that surrounds that particular unit (De Saussure, F. 2011). Hence, in the notion of Derrida's "Undecidable" points to this dynamic as cultural productions foster and affects each other, they structure each other and carry motives of past and different structures which gives them the ambiguity of originality. It is not possible to mention a strict pure peculiarity of any kind of production (GORMAN, Clare. 2015).

Accordingly, in the cities, new architectural motives take their inspiration and design from previous cultural production and interpret them in different mediums. The contemporary architectural surfaces that people are surrounded by are examples of that interpretation. and

especially in crowded cities these surfaces can be visible to every inhabitant of the location as 3D moving graphics.

There are some examples from mostly Asian countries such as China and Japan as being production market of improved technology.

The early example of using façades for video production can be seen in an event called as “A biennial of Creative Videos” (Figure 5) out of cooperation of You Tube and Google play with technological supporters of some firms such as “HP” and “Intel” on the date of 21 October 2010. All videos were projected on the façade of Guggenheim museum for audience. The idea actually remind of the concept of “future cities” of 80’s sci-fi movies.



**Figure 5:** A biennial of Creative Videos, façade of Gugenheim museum, 2010

Later on with the support of developed technology more three dimensional graphics replaced the Gugenheim example such as the facade of the Taikoo Li shopping mall in the Chinese city of Chengdu. On the outer façade of the building people can observe advertising videos. In the video a space ship appears in the form of a science fiction movie of Star Trek that is known as “U.S.S Enterprise” (Figure 6) (<https://gadgettendency.com/3d-effect-panel-on-shopping-mall-facade-in-china-video/>).



Figure 6: Taikoo Li shopping mall and U.S.S Enterprise

Moreover, building façades change with this technological development. Once one can identify styles by analyzing its architectural features, or as it was in modern architecture form that is visible on the surface of the building follows its function (Roth, L. M. 2018). However, façades recently have become an opening to another dimension by showing three dimensional virtual World. “FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE INTERGRADE Red XIII 3D Billboard is another example for this kind of façades (Figure 7). Hence, with this perspective it is possible to coat Einstein "Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited, whereas imagination embraces the entire world, stimulating progress, giving birth to evolution." Einstein (EINSTEIN, Albert. 2000).

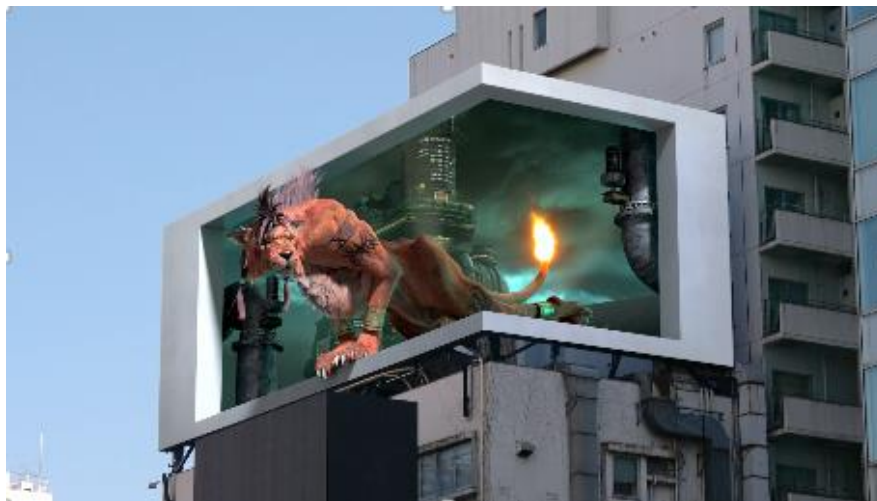


Figure 7: FINAL FANTASY VII REMAKE INTERGRADE Red XIII 3D Billboard

## 5. CONCLUSION

Future cities have been foreseen and depicted in cinema and in science fiction literature in the 70's and 80's. Cultural heritage, common knowledge in modern and postmodern era brings the notion of techno-metamorphosis as it was mentioned in the concept of “projectile” discussed by Deleuze within the same time period. Deleuze, in this concept argues that every kind of project is actually a projectile (which can be described as the area, the surface or the canvas

itself) the rest of the project will keep on changing according to the technology that the era brings (Pascal Michon, 2021). After a kind of breaking point in the technological advancements and facilities in hand, the projectile will remain but the project will have a very short life depending on the cultural memory that the designer lives within.

With a different but yet similar approach, Derrida argues in the same time period that culture is a living organism that its creations are “undecidable” in terms of ownership or in today's term “copyright”.

Technological facilities effect the productions of every field in every era of the history. In this study two different levels of creation have been compared. The first group includes the fictional advertising videos that took place in 1980s SCI-FI movies and literature. The second group includes various 3D advertising animations that takes place in building facades of Asian metropolises. This comparative study indicates that past fiction became a part of the motives that shapes the cities of today with the help of technological advancement. What was once a prediction for the graphical elements of a future city became practical graphic element of some of the Asian cities.

Researches show that, what was imagined on the screen 30 years ago became the future city of today in more than one way. What was not possible to create 3 dimensionally is possible to build today, realized in front of our eyes. This cultural interaction will continue to affect future creations and generations.

Above mentioned examples of 80's sci-fi case studies and comparisons can also be adapted to different decades of 20th century to find out their effects on today's future cities. Further study related to the subject can be researched upon the relation in between contemporary sci-fi and fantastic literature / cinema and new architectural urban projects and applications such as virtual architecture design or parametrical architecture as being the new field of application.

## REFERENCES

- Abouhela, I. M., Dewidar, K. M., & El-Gohary, A. F. (2007). The Image of Future City in Science Fiction Films. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305999595\\_The\\_Image\\_of\\_Future\\_City\\_in\\_Science\\_Fiction\\_Films](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305999595_The_Image_of_Future_City_in_Science_Fiction_Films).
- Abohela, I. (2015). Future City In Science Fiction Films: Reading and Extrapolating The Depiction Of The City In Sci-Fi Films. *Representation Of Identities and Film Studies*, 476.
- Cunliffe, L. (2011). Creative grammar and art education. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 45(3), 1-14.
- Cunliffe, L. (2015). Wittgenstein's and Gombrich's parallel therapeutic projects and art education. *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 49(1), 20-35. doi:10.5406/jaesteduc.49.1.0020.
- De la Iglesia, M. (2018, August). Has Akira Always Been a Cyberpunk Comic?. In *Arts* (Vol. 7, No. 3, p. 32). MDPI.
- Einstein, A., & Monro, H. (2000). Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world. *International Journal of High Speed Electronics and Systems*, 10(2), 413.
- Gorman, C. (2015). *The undecidable: Jacques Derrida and Paul Howard*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.



Graham, S. (2016). Vertical noir: Histories of the future in urban science fiction. *City*, 20(3), 389-406.

<https://gadgettendency.com/3d-effect-panel-on-shopping-mall-facade-in-china-video/>)

McLeod, S. (2007). Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development.

Michon, P. (2021). Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari and the Rhuthmoi of War – Part 3. *Rhuthmos*, <https://rhuthmos.eu/spip.php?article2729>.

Roth, L. M. (2018). *Understanding architecture: Its elements, history, and meaning*. Routledge.

Weisdorf, J. L. (2005). From foraging to farming: Explaining the Neolithic Revolution. *Journal of Economic Surveys*, 19(4), 561-586.