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# Flânerie through the cities of the future

## Flânerie *pelas cidades do futuro*

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### ABSTRACT

This study takes Walter Benjamin's idea of *flânerie* as a methodological tool designed to travel across imaginary futuristic cities in four science fiction films. The *flanêur*, therefore, is a cognitive operator that leads me to think of another way of appreciating films, creating my own time of observation and learning from fiction the ideas of the future that currently create futuristic urban landscapes. This study results from the research "Human Futures: the imaginary perception of urban environments and landscapes of the future in contemporary cinema", which investigates the projections of the social imaginary about the future of urban spaces in science fiction cinema, and ponders on its reflexes in today's society.

**Keywords:** *Flânerie*, futuristic cities, science fiction, imaginary

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### RESUMO

Este artigo toma a ideia de *flânerie*, de Walter Benjamin, como uma ferramenta metodológica pensada para percorrer cidades futurísticas imaginárias em quatro filmes de ficção científica. O *flanêur*, portanto, é um operador cognitivo que me leva a construir uma outra forma de apreciar os filmes, criando meu próprio tempo de observação e apreendendo da ficção as ideias de futuro que hoje criam as paisagens urbanas futuristas. Este artigo resulta da pesquisa "Futuros Humanos: A percepção imaginária dos ambientes urbanos e paisagens do futuro no cinema contemporâneo", que investiga as projeções do imaginário social sobre o futuro dos ambientes urbanos no cinema de ficção científica, considerando seus reflexos na sociedade atual.

**Palavras-chave:** *Flânerie*, cidades futuristas, ficção científica, imaginário

*The principle of flânerie in Proust. "So, away from all this literary concerns and without tying me to anything, suddenly a roof, the sun's reflection on a rock, the smell of a path held me through the singular pleasure they provided me, and because they seemingly hid, beyond what I could see, something that invited me to seek and, despite my efforts, I could not discover." Du Côté de Chez Swann, vol.01, Paris, 1939p. 256.*

Walter Benjamin

ALLOWING YOURSELF TO be taken by everything that surrounds you, inaugurating, at every step on the street, a new experience in the world. But not only being taken by smells and sounds of crowded streets from modern cities, it is also necessary to evoke this feeling and build it in your writing. The thorough report of experience makes time present and gives live texture to experience itself. Walter Benjamin (2018) reinvents the street chronist in the *flâneur* craft on the beginning of the 20th century, and this character inspires me as a methodological device to the philosopher, the artist or even the ethnographer that wants to recognize the nuances from street life in their era.

Unlike hurried passers-by on the sidewalks, who have countless goals to accomplish throughout the day, the *flâneur* has only one: being completely available to observe and feel how the spirit of time happens in the streets. This single objective has the intrinsic political meaning of trying to resist the speed and rush of modern times that suffocate the time of tradition. Hence, the *flâneur's* focused exercise is to become uttermost present at the sensations and impulses from the streets, as to be able to witness the minimal and almost imperceptible occurrences from his time. The *flâneur* strolls, has fun, talks at newsstands, in bars, but for him everything and everyone are part of his study of experience in the poetic intimacy of urban everyday life.

*Flânerie is based, among other things, on the assumption that the fruit of idleness is more precious than that of work. Notoriously, the flâneur "studies". The Larousse from the 19th century claims in this regard: "his open eye and attentive ear are searching for different things other than what the crowds are looking for. A word casually cast reveals one of those character traces that cannot be invented and needs to be capture live; these physiognomies so naively attentive will provide the painter with an expression he dreamed of; a rattling, negligible to most ears, will touch the musician and give them and idea for a harmonic composition; even to the thinker, to the philosopher lost in their reverie, this external upheaval is fruitful: it mixes and shakes the ideas, as storms mix the waves of the sea..." (Benjamin, 2018, p. 756).*

For Benjamin, Paris from the turn of the 19th to the 20th century is the place where the modernity happens bringing crowds to the streets, with its tables on sidewalks in front of bistro and night life stretched out until late under the glow of streets always illuminated by the electricity recently introduced in the poles of the boulevards. It is a new sociological event in which the agglomerations are immersed in a new city experience. According to Benjamin, people were no longer able to live an experience of tradition that allowed a delicate attention to the present of each moment of the experience. For that reason, he finds in the *flâneur* someone that was not captured by the urgency of modernity that empties the experience of the subject.

*By being a social type that lives on the threshold between the experience of tradition (Erfahrung) and the experience of modernity (Erlebnis), more precisely the astonishing one (Chockerlebnis), the flâneur still manages to have this perceptive flexibility that gives him a way of looking that makes it possible, more than seeing, to read both the city in history and history in the city, as well as its other types. Among them, we highlight the player and the student, with whom he forms, according to Benjamin, some kind of trilogy of idleness. (Biondillo. 2014. p. 14).*

The *flâneur* is an incredibly fascinating character that I become in this article as the operator of a methodological exercise. The motivation to know the spirit of time carefully observing the daily life on the streets I direct to traverse streets, alleys and every urban area presented in 04 futuristic fiction movies. In other words, I have no interest on the plot, nor the story or the protagonists from those movies. What moves me is only the interest in walking and feeling the streets, paying attention to extras, to the architecture of buildings, to the city planning, and to try to imagine what the inhabitants think and feel. I tried to put myself as another extra, that is why I paused the movie many times whenever urban spaces appeared and presented characters and places that would disappear in seconds. I created time to contemplate places where the camera goes too fast. That way I forced the movie to give myself time to appreciate street life. I allow myself to dream and imagine what would be like the life of that woman, or that man, or that robot that appear for 03 seconds or less in the background of the scenes. Since I no longer have a commitment to the film, I let myself be taken over several times by the curiosity of contemplating the city as a landscape.

*Landscape – this is what the city really becomes for the flâneur. Or more precisely: for him, the city splits into its dialectical poles. It opens to him as a landscape and closes around him as a room. (Benjamin, 2018, p. 703)*

The benjaminian *flâneur* has the mission of returning liveliness to experience, therefore, one must be attentive to let the flow of events in the modern narrative pass and take time when glancing at the simplicity of the streets, thus rediscovering time. In this exercise concerning futuristic cities, as I mentioned I had to pause and rewind the movies several time. I needed to rediscover passages through alleys, bridges and crossings, to find posters on the walls, garbage on alleys and props on the facades of buildings, so I could delve into an urban imaginary of the future through 04 cities in 04 films.

The “visited” places were Los Angeles, *Blade Runner* (1982), by Ridley Scott. I also visited New Port City, an imaginary city in Japan created for the anime and movie *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), by Mamoru Oshii. Finally, I went to the cities of London and Cologne, the latter also an imaginary city located somewhere in Australia, at the end of the 21st century, both created for the movie *Total Recall* (2012). It is important to say that in these films it is possible to follow an everyday life designed for these futuristic cities. They clearly bring the construction of images of an urban life within which their stories unfold, this is why they interested me.

In this paper, I took images of cinema as expressions of a technological imaginary that combines the eternal desire to know the future with the communicative capacity to reach the masses. Futuristic science fiction in cinema manages to create images crossed by the same desires and fears that inspired ancient folk to try to guess what was to come through their prophetic oracles.

Through this speculation new worlds arise, distant planets, mysterious islands, underwater ruins and overcrowded cities of people from all over the world, mixed with robots, cyborgs and a huge fauna of humanoid hybrids with machines vying for spaces in these environments. This is the aspect of human futures that is of interest to this paper: glancing as a *flâneur* over the imaginary that today is made of agglomerations in metropolis and big cities presented in the futuristic films mentioned above. A recursive appearance of images in several films that mix the sophistication of buildings, vehicles, high-end urban digital artifacts with the precariousness of alleys and passageways, where the underworld negotiates remains and contraband from the technological world.

This paper is a result of the research “Human Futures: A percepção imaginária dos ambientes urbanos e paisagens do futuro no cinema contemporâneo”. This study investigates the projections of the social imaginary concerning the future of urban environments in science fiction cinema, taking its reflexes on present society into account. This text deals with the images produced by science fiction cinema not as something that ends in the exhibition halls, but as something that echoes in our fantasy beyond the times. These

images are reappearances of fears and desires - affections - that endure in our imagination and dreams. These affections are intrinsically connected to the human species in this collective social unconsciousness that Gilbert Durand called **imaginary**: “we see the imaginary, more than ever, as constituent of the dynamic and spiritual capital of homo-sapiens” (Durand, 2012, p.5). This symbolic capital accompanies us symbiotically, we feed on it and feed it, in a cycle that defines the existence of the human on the planet.

## BLADE RUNNER

**Figure 1**

*Los Angeles, EUA, November 2019.*



*Note. Screenshot from the movie Blade Runner. (Time code: 10'45'')*

When I flew over Los Angeles at night it was like floating over the flames of old oil-well towers of the cities bordering the Persian Gulf. Down below, straight lines of lights show the streets of a city drawn with a ruler, dotted with gigantic luminous buildings, true fortresses in the middle of the city. Just like that you arrive in Los Angeles at the beginning of winter when the mornings get warmer and the nights colder, oscillating between 10 and 22 degrees. Arriving at night in Los Angeles in these flying cars is scary. The buildings are intimidating. They are dark, long blocks that project into the skies, sprinkled by numerous lights of their internal environments. Which reminds of Baudelaire through Benjamin:

“There is no object more profound, more mysterious, more fertile, more sinister, more dazzling than a candle lit window.” Charles Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris*, Paris, Ed. R. Simon, p.62 (“Les fenêtres”). (Benjamin, 2018, P.732)

When I walked along the sidewalks, I was struck by lights flashing over the heads of passers-by. At the top of the facades of many of the buildings Japanese and Chinese advertising videos are projected. Chinese ideograms spread in the marquees of all buildings. In the futuristic Los Angeles of 2019 Japanese and Chinese conquered the night lights. There is always a fog cut off by rain and neon effects on these November LA nights. In parts of the city, a large number of people elbow each other under lighted lightsaber-like umbrellas. They walk through narrow streets reminiscent of the food markets and alleyways of small restaurants in Tokyo. In other sections of the city, more distant from the center, a vast emptiness extends through deserted streets in almost completely abandoned neighborhoods.

Everywhere you walk you can see airships covered with lights and screens through the sky, inviting people to invest in a new life or look for a better world and have a new beginning in the colonies outside the Earth. Aerial advertising tries to repeat the myth of the land of freedom and opportunity that brought thousands of Europeans to America centuries ago. For a moment, these announcements always above people make you feel that life on Earth is hopeless. Los Angeles has big uninhabited empty zones. Many people already left to live on those colonies in other planets, but the city also has overpopulated neighborhoods, crammed with all human tribes, punks, devotees of Krishna, Turkish merchants, eastern street vendors.

People transit in the streets alien to the announcement of another promised land on their heads, not realizing that the city invites them to leave. Maybe many want to, but not everyone can. People with degenerative diseases, such as JF Sebastian, one of the characters in the film, do not pass the medical examinations that allow them to migrate to the colonies. Along with thousands of people, Sebastian goes through his days on naturalized suffocation in which people no longer listen to the advertising that offers a better world.

Even in daylight it is hard to see the top of LA's gloomy skyscrapers when you look up. They always disappear in the middle of the fog that filters out daylight. From inside this fog, you can only see the lights turn on and off at various times of the day. There are several ways to get to know Los Angeles, but all are divided into two planes: traversing a plane at ground level through narrow streets, dirty and overpopulated alleys, lights always flashing on facades, smell of fried food packed through the cold fog of November. In the other plane it is possible to know LA on flying vehicles that run through the city among the skyscrapers tens of meters above the ground. From the window of these vehicles, one crosses the whole city through street lines and aerial corners. Crossing billboards and illuminated signs placed to be seen from above.



The aerial streets show another side of the city, the giant shadowy buildings and their aerials appear more clearly, and you can even see some inhabitants in the bright spots of the dark wall.

When the rain stops on these November nights, several people risk themselves in groups on night bike rides. They wear their yellow raincoats and circumvent the beggars who warm themselves around bonfires in the middle of the street. Blue TV monitors hanging from poles mark what seems to be bus stops. Following the panoramic camera in the cold of night I try to read some words in the streets. There is rarely a phrase or word in English, everything is full of ideograms on posters or on the graffiti in garbage dumps and walls of colossal buildings. This city has gone sad, it echoes that one day it welcomed its inhabitants, one day it was possible to be happy in Los Angeles. Suddenly the rain stops, and you can see the dirt on the streets become mud.

The street markets for synthetic animals are especially curious. They resemble the old street bazaars of Istanbul and Tehran where you could find the most diverse products scattered on crammed small stalls and shops. Right on the sidewalk there are street food vendors with their grills lit with the most diverse types of skewers. The LA synthetic animal market is multicultural and contains eagles and ornamental fish. The animals are announced by the shouting of the vendors in search of customers. Raccoons in cages and ostriches on the loose share space with customers in crowded alleys at any time of the day. Hybrid horses and snakes made with genetic engineering and robotics are displayed in stores. Walking through these alleys brings a mixture of excitement, curiosity and fear of bumping into the animals.

## Figura 2

Downtown Los Angeles



Note. Screenshot from the movie *Blade Runner*. (Time code: 56'49")



At the outskirts is where you can find the most people at any time of the day. In Chinatown, people and flightless cars compete for space on the streets. Amid the noises of the city, I can hear a metallic voice that also disputes the sound ambience. In an attempt to organize the traffic, a robotic mechanism installed on a street pole, with several monitors and sound outputs, insistently says: “cross now, cross now, cross now”. Or “don’t cross, don’t cross, don’t cross” over and over. Nobody listens, nobody obeys.

## GHOST IN THE SHELL

**Figure 3**

*New Port City, 2029*



Note. <https://www.behance.net/gallery/51424063/GHOST-IN-THE-SHELL>

Arriving in New Port City, the Japanese imaginary city created for the movie *Ghost in the Shell* feels like arriving at an amusement park. The city is introduced by its commercial center, the busiest neighborhood in the city. The first thing that draws attention are the streets that can have floors. They both run at ground level, as well as spread in elevated corridors, like viaducts over several floors crossing the entire city. So, the travelers in vehicles have different notions of the city depending on the street floor being used to go through a neighborhood. This way of walking through the streets also influences the way street advertisements are presented. The billboards were replaced by giant holograms, shapes several meters high that appear in the middle of the street under slogans and jingles that echo throughout the environment. The ads feature new robotic implants for improvements to the human body,

called cyber-enhancements, cosmetics with nanotechnology substances; safety services for the genetic structure of children (I have no idea what that is) and a vast number of products and services of several types.

Many giant light panels stream Japanese calligraphy – which are beautiful in its own – through the facade of buildings, even if it is not known whether they are part of some advertisement or just the name of the company installed in the building. When you walk the streets, it is difficult to distinguish 100% organic humans, robots, holograms or enhanced humans; somehow, they all look alike. Their faces have no expression or are covered by masks and accessories for expanding communication and reading information from the environment. Everyone seems taken by an automated daily life. People do not speak in the streets, the voices that can be heard are the advertising of gigantic holograms. Each one lives in a particular world of virtual interaction with things that are not in front of them. Consequently, even when walking in the streets, people do not interact with each other in person, they manage their lives in simultaneous metaverses.

But there is one thing extremely curious about humans and humanoids in New Port City: robots are trying to appear more and more humanized, using all kinds of synthetic skin and advanced conversation programs, whereas, on the other hand, humans are increasingly robotic, with hundreds of implants and biotechnological enhancements that can clearly show that they are cyborgs. Therefore, as the body-machine fusion is a tendency of humanization (or robotization) here, even humans who have no technological improvements simulate enhanced body parts with plastic masks of metallic appearance, like the prostitutes from the outskirts.

On the psychology of flâneur: “the unreasonable scenes, which we can all rewatch by closing our eyes, are not those we contemplate with a guidebook in hand, but those we did not paid attention to at the time, the ones we went through thinking about something else – a sin, a girlfriend or a puerile annoyance”. (Benjamin, 2018, P.733).

To know the diversity of beings of New Port City you need to look very closely at people who pass by. At the commercial center is the most diverse fauna of cybernetic beings ever seen, some with minor improvements made by implants and others with bodies completely modified by genetic engineering, as well as many robots and holograms. This central part of the city is extremely colorful with its LED fluorescent and neon lights, fluorescent, as well as the lights of the holograms themselves. For this reason, this region is always very

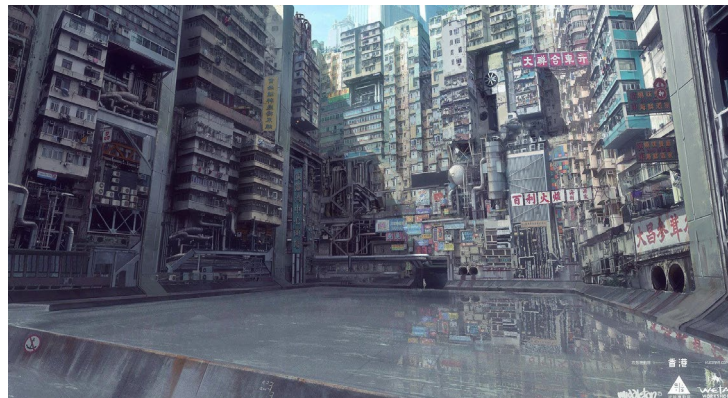
luminous at any time of the day, you can hardly notice the little sunlight that crosses the heavy and gray clouds in the morning.

All traffic signs in this central part of the city are holographic, they can appear, disappear, or simply change indication at any time. But holograms are not only in buildings and traffic signs, they also are spread through the streets in shapes of people or animals, on taxi plates, as hair for androids, even luminous fish swim over heads as if all around were a corridor of lights. The central region of New Port City resembles a pinball machine lit and in activity, with many lights always alternating, provoking the feeling of a game in which those who pass on the street are the characters.

But as soon as you get a little away from the streets of the New Port commercial center, it is like going back in time. On the multiethnic popular markets, narrow corridors of alleys and passageways have exposed hydraulic pipes and air conditioners hanging from the windows of buildings. The dumpsters and traffic signs are the same as any 20th century Japanese city. The remote neighborhoods are not only more geographically distant from the center, they are also more technologically distant, which makes them therefore more distant in time. It is as if the most peripheral neighborhoods were 150 years away from the central region of the city. In the region called Lawless Zone, you can see kludges of wires on poles crossing the streets, old cars abandoned on the street corners, heavy constructions resembling prisons, coffin-like buildings filthy of mud with clothes hanging from the windows and garbage on the marquees of the floors, thrown by the residents from the above floors.

**Figure 4**

*Outskirts of New Port City*



Note. <https://www.wallpaperflare.com/ghost-in-the-shell-digital-art-urban-city-water-anime-wallpaper-gjaeo>

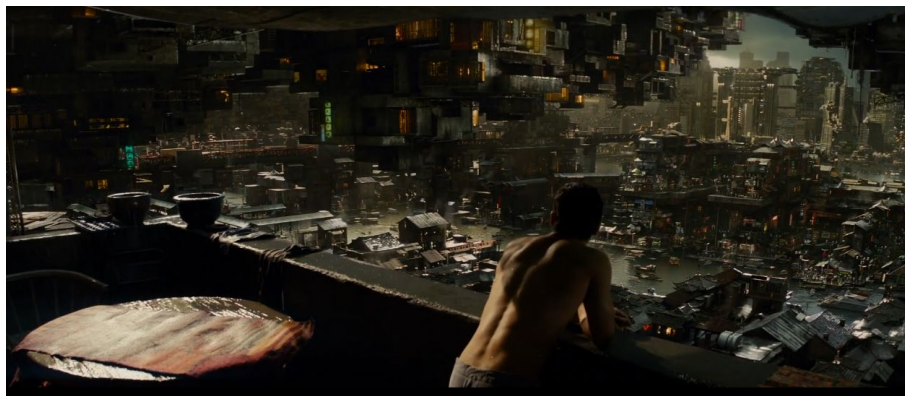
The distant residential complexes from the more remote neighborhoods maintain the same strong trend of verticalization of the skyscrapers that can be seen at the center. Gigantic buildings – without the sparkles and lights from the center–, with tiny apartments, which seen from afar are reminiscent of the huge residential complexes that spread through the working-class neighborhoods in the outskirts of cities such as Moscow and Warsaw during the time of the old iron curtain of communist countries. Buildings without personality, huge concrete boxes dotted with windows crammed into reduced square meters in each apartment. New Port City further widens the gap between social classes by creating through technological difference a time gap between different regions of the city.

### TOTAL RECALL: THE COLONY

I loved diving through the time of this place, even though it was a city designed to be the expression of the planetary periphery at the end of the 21st century. At first, looking panoramically at the city, we are frightened by the considerable number of enormous boxes of dark reinforced concrete, juxtaposed as if they were embedded, which serve as housing for the workers. The Colony is like any overpopulated metropolis of the 20th century. This impression of overpopulation is noticed through the landscape of houses that have a large number of illuminated boxes piled up on the banks of a river. It is always exceedingly difficult to describe what the image of a place makes you feel when we experience them calmly.

#### Figure 5

*Colony, end of the 21st century*



Note. Screenshot from the movie *Total Recall*. (Time code: 08'44")

I will attempt to describe the Colony in another way: it is as if we visited a large container park piled up in the courtyard of a port. The containers are concrete boxes, each being a store or an apartment. Public lighting wires connect the airspace between the containers. There are a lot of stores that sell Chinese goods, but their facades are discreet. They can be recognized by the pagoda-shaped roof or the luminous ideograms on the doors. Knowing that the Colony houses the poorest part from the proletariat of the planet in the future of this film, at first the precariousness of the always dark buildings draws the attention. The city is not welcoming at first sight. When the city is seen from a distance, it reminds you of dark pieces of a randomly assembled LEGO toy.

On this description I add another picture: narrow streets that are linked by alleys and passageways bordering canals that branch out between the neighborhoods, remembering the canals that spread through Venice. Much of the circulation in this city passes through these neighborhoods with boats and ferries full of Asian people. The boat activity on the canals reminds me, on the other hand, of the floating markets of Bangkok. When I experienced calmly this part of the city, I started to like the Colony. It has a more pleasant and attractive atmosphere in the nightlife on the banks of the canals.

This is one of the last regions of the world where life is still possible, despite the dense air, always gray due to chemical discharges that have made life on Earth almost completely unfeasible. In the Colony I focused and realized that it rained thin, almost at the same time I saw that the subway is some kind of robust train, which most resembles a war tank, with plasma screens where advertising is displayed to those who are outside. There is a strong vigilance everywhere, carried by robots or soldiers dressed in white armor throughout the body.

It is intriguing how the buildings and the streets are so dark. Large rectangular structures of concrete spread out everywhere. One night, walking through the Colony I saw a night street market, with products that could be found at any other street market in the world, such as peppers, tomatoes, greens of all kinds (probably produced by genetic engineering). These markets spread across the contours of the canals, side by side with bar tables, along with incense sellers attached on car hubcaps. It is interesting to notice how there are young people in the Colony. In these narrow streets you can hear laughter and conversations in bars. Everyone ends up getting remarkably close to each other by the very geography of the business district. By hearing the voices of people on the streets I feel like the city pulses, it somehow welcomes the desires of life that shape it.

On the legend of the flâneur: “With the help of a word I hear as I pass, I reconstitute an entire conversation, a whole life; the tone of a voice is enough to unite the name



of a capital sin to the man with whom I have just come across, from whom I only took a glimpsed at the profile.” Victor Fournel, *Ce Qu'on Voit dans les Rues de Paris*, Paris, 1858, p.270. (Benjamin, 2018, P.723).

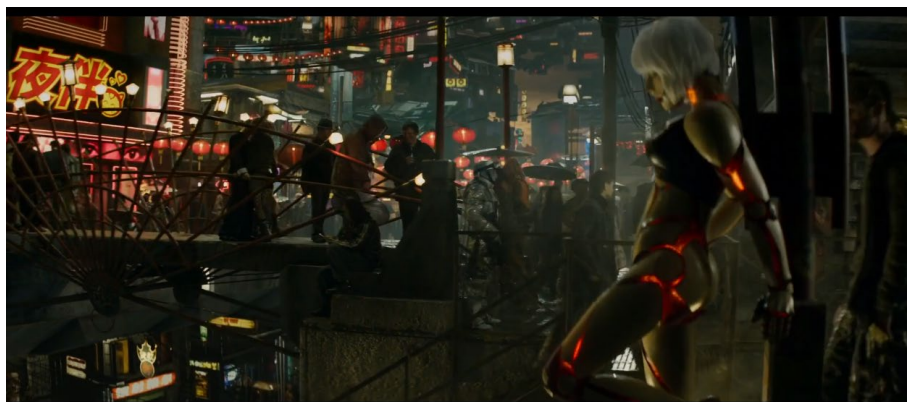
On a poster glued to the wall of an alley I see a young woman sitting on the floor of a stage. There are several posters like these scattered on these streets, this one in particular seems to be the announcement of a show or a play. Impossible to know. On the Colony, the posters are usually written with Chinese ideograms.

The Colony has its own Red-Light District<sup>1</sup>, the most illuminated neighborhood of the entire city. Here it is possible to feel the ubiquitous atmosphere of fun and leisure in the air. Music echoes on the streets, people dance on the sidewalks. A robot with female characteristics offers sexual programs leaning against a pole; a mutant girl with three breasts approaches customers in the streets. The most diverse tribes of young people with multicolored hair make their private parties on the sidewalks. On an outdoor store a tattoo artist creates a gigantic fluorescent image of a dragon on the back of a customer; women dance in display windows; in the streets people have fun under a constant fine rain. Most of these people carry Chinese umbrellas to protect themselves. The sidewalks are connected by small bridges over the canals and the songs are played from everywhere, but it catches my attention when I see a DJ on a boat parked in one of the canals and many people stopping on the bridges and sidewalks to dance to their songs.

<sup>1</sup> Amsterdam's central district known for neon lights in display windows where women exhibit themselves for prostitution.

## Figure 6

*Downtown Colony*



Note. Screenshot from the movie *Total Recall*. (Time code: 32'40'')

**TOTAL RECALL – LONDON**

I did not spend too much time in London. In fact, the film spends little time in the streets of London, but the little I saw from the city center left me perplexed. London has become the gearbox of a giant machine for everyone to see, this is the best image I can come up to define what a landscape made me feel and think. Despite all its technological sophistication, the city is not beautiful anymore, it lost its charm. It seems to me that in this future not even the rich got the best part of the world. Here London mixes its old urban layout with new heavy and giant buildings. The city is packed with skyscrapers that look like fortresses.

**Figure 7**

*London, end of the 21st century*



*Note.* Screenshot from the movie *Total Recall*. (Time code: 53'24").

However what shocks the most is the verticalization of the city. This is the most radical form of street structure superimposed on different floors, creating different city floor plans, that I have ever seen. There are several overlapping types of London cut by suspended streets, supported by huge cables and vehicle lifts. Those who look from the ground up at the Big Ben, for example, will no longer see the free sky, but a heap of iron structures and cables that support elevated highways on different floors.

In these highways cars move on magnetic mattresses at extremely high speeds. When vehicles want to go up or down to other highways on other floors, they can use the lifts on the roadsides. Therefore, the traffic system is hung and suspended by cables and steel structures through the skies of the city, creating a web spread over tens of meters high. But that does not eliminate the land traffic with wheeled cars that still exists as it was known in the 20th century.



**Figure 8***Overlapping streets in London*

Note. Screenshot from the movie *Total Recall*. (Time code: 59'24'')

Similarly, as vehicle traffic, open spaces for pedestrians also spread across raised platforms with trees between buildings, creating the idea of a verticalized public environment throughout the city. So, finding an address in London also means knowing on which floor it is located. There are banks, shops, residences, and restaurants distributed on several floors that those coming from ground level only have access through a building that has an elevator to the indicated floor. London remains a very gray, cosmopolitan city, but with an aging population. You can hardly see young people on the streets. Unfortunately, I did not had access to more images of the city that allowed me to imagine what its residents dream about.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Even though my *flâneries* through the cities of the future have been limited to what the plots of the films allow me to see from the urban spaces, therefore, I was not at liberty to follow my own paths through the cities (I just rewatched the same excerpts, paused and calmly contemplated the environments as a landscape). It is possible to say that the idea we form today of the future of the cities mirrored in these films reveal many coincidences. The *flânerie* thought as a methodological exercise runs out of diegetic time, and this allowed me to let myself be taken and expand the perception of an ambience that was thought to be mere backdrop of the films.

There is a similarity between this methodological proposal and the method of **psychogeographic drift**, proposed by Debord (1958). The drift is mobilized by the affective effects of the urban environment on those who travel it. The method

involves being taken by chance through an indefinite route, being attracted or repelled, designing a more intense emotional participation in the psychic construction of inhabiting a city. The one who drifts has a notebook in which he records why the paths made were chosen, why he turned to the left and not to the right, which sensations drove or stopped the choice of routes. Thus, emerges one clear difference of intentionality between thinking of this gesture of looking through the diegetic landscapes of the films as a drift or as a *flânerie*.

The *flâneur* is less passive to the environment, in fact he is deeply active in the choices he makes without consulting his motivations in choosing the path. As a method, the *flâneur* intentionally brings his gaze on what is not seen, describes what is not seen, because the intention of modern life, as the intention of these films, is to have the city as the background of its temporal and narrative logic, respectively. The *flâneur* method stops time to observe carefully what occurs outside the temporal logic of the city or the intentional logic from the film narrative, in my case. In this sense, he is more active about the city and less reactive to its affective mobilizations.

The depiction of the *flâneur* forecast the one of a detective. The *flâneur* should seek social legitimacy for his behavior. It suited him perfectly to see his indolence presented as a semblance, behind which is in fact hidden the firm attention of an observer following relentlessly the criminal who suspects nothing. (Benjamin, 2018, P.739).

So, this form of research that is the *flânerie* revealed the power of recurring images of the future presenting forms that become commonplace in the imaginary of urban centers from futuristic megalopolises. Megalopolises full of neon and large holograms on the facades of buildings; robots and cyborgs that walk the always busy streets, immersed in the polyphony of noises from flying vehicles, advertisements and indiscernible voices. The skies can rarely be seen, they are always heavy with acid clouds that create a gray-lead tone over the buildings. In any case what we see when we look up are large luminous panels, holographic or not. People walk the streets immersed in the schedule of their commitments or in their virtual interactions in metaverses via implants or devices such as glasses and helmets. They are alien to their surroundings, just like the crowds that Benjamin found in early 20th century Paris.

However, where these cities resemble themselves the most is on the idea of verticalization of the urban road network. In all of them, the streets spread through the neighborhoods as several floors on top of each other. Sometimes, there is a steel structure suspended in the skies that let vehicles circulate on

different plateaus of altitude. Other times vehicles only fly between buildings that always have advertising images at any level of air circulation. Namely, there is a city at ground level and several others that overlap as floors in space.

When we move away from the central region of these cities, we can see how the outskirts are taken by heaps of buildings, in neighborhoods centuries distant from the technologies the great centers have. Poverty, junk and garbage are spread through the streets. Further away from the urban regions of these cities, ruins and deserts that did not survive the ecosystem collapse can be found. In all these futures the planet's ecosystems have collapsed completely. It is not clear what happened and how it happened. The fact of the matter is that it has led much of the planet being sterile, contaminated by levels of radiation and unfeasible to any form of life.

The Chinese and Japanese people appear to be the only living ones that have spread across the planet regardless of any collapse. Only in *Blade Runner* was Earth destined for the more advanced replicants and for humans who could not migrate because of some health issue and the outcasts unwanted in the new worlds. However, the natural way for those who can is to leave the planet. All those who remain, except for the replicants, are days past their extinction. They are about to disappear due to the terrible environmental conditions that befall the city, and certainly the planet.

These cities show various forms of blurring the physical and psychic boundaries between humans and machines. They show that the Earth is now home to a more improved species than the homo sapiens. And by more improved, I mean more resistant to acid rain, toxic air, lack of food and lack of sun. A species more resistant to all forms of destruction that homo sapiens left on Earth before leaving to live in space colonies.

This is what this picture of the future reveals in these works. The imaginary is a repertoire of images that constitutes themselves affectively as a psychic ballast of our species. This timeless image bank is formed by all the references inherited and created by homo sapiens, of all aspects of life that migrated by affectivity to unconscious dimensions of human collectives. The imaginary is composed of the structuring perceptions of social life, constituents of our values, fears and perspectives. But the way I perceive it, it is indistinguishable from a real world. As though there was a real world and an imagined one. What we call the real world is an aspect of the imaginary that we socially and historically agreed to call reality. This way the imaginary wears what is considered real as a hand wears a glove. What is considered real is a possible, collectively chosen and shared dimension of our creations, of what we imagine and legitimize as truth.

The futuristic imaginary presented in this article is inseparable from the technological repertoire that we are used to imagine through science fiction narratives. This future is also intertwined with our present, with our fears and expectations for the present. Therefore, this is a small sample of some expressions of the contemporary imaginary about the future of urban landscapes on our planet. They do not define what it is to come, but they indicate the fear and perplexity on our own destiny expressed through the western technological contemporary liberal historicity regime<sup>2</sup> (Hartog, 2019). These are symptoms that still give us time to choose and change. Change the very regime of historicity or perhaps allow ourselves to explore other imaginaries of western cultures and marginalized people, that were prevented from expressing and building options of worlds to come in our present. ■

<sup>2</sup> Historicity regime means the perception about past and future conceived and lived in the present of a social group inserted in a historical and cultural context.

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