

ADDENDUM TO THE ARCADIAN MYTH: SCIENCE FICTION AND CONTEMPORARY UTOPIAN DISCOURSE IN ARCHITECTURE

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Abstract The post-modern disappointment with modern utopia, with the megalopolis as its preferred example, represents the general context of the present study. More particularly, in the context of contemporary re-evaluations of modernity, the paper tries to see whether holding to the validity of the modern paradigm, in respect to the scientific model, may still create space for contemporary utopia. In the realm of architecture, such texts do exist, but a framework of analysis is needed in order to make their evaluation. Addressing the intrinsic relation between myth and utopia, under its various forms (rural – city, nature – culture, *domus* – megalopolis), the paper borrows from science-fiction criticism considerations on such discourses and proposes a possible set of criteria for their analysis.

Keywords myth, utopia, science-fiction, modernity, architectural theory

1. Introduction

In an extended context, the paper addresses the problem of utopian thinking in the field of architecture within the contemporary re-evaluation of modernity. While the prodigal trust in the benefits of the future under the auspices of progress proved a disappointment for late modernity, the paper tries to see how the scientific model, held valid in some architectural discourses and theories, may influence a renewed confidence in the future and a possible re-imagining of the utopia.

The need for the study appears on the background of the pair formed by myth and utopia, a pair that is discussed in contemporary or late-modern literature in relation with other pairs such as memory–history, rural–urban, nature–civilisation. Some theses developed by authors in relation to these pairs of terms are considered premises of the present paper. One such premise is the assertion made by Fredric Jameson that myth and utopia are interlinked. Following Bradley's reasoning on cause and effect,¹ Jameson shows how the impossibility of

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¹ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: the Desire called Utopia and other Science Fictions*

today's utopia is based on the depreciation of myth, which is, ultimately, nothing else but the primary form of desire expressed by the peasant.² This hypothesis allows for the evaluation of a series of discourses within or at the margins of architectural theory, that deplore the loss of myth and the impossibility of utopia as signs of the crisis of modernity. For instance, we can consider discourses which point out the crisis of the metropolis as an expression of a too fulfilled modern utopia: Jean Baudrillard's *America*,³ Rem Koolhaas's *Life in the Metropolis or the Culture of Congestion*,⁴ Massimo Caciari's *Eupalinos or architecture*⁵ are such examples. Jean Lyotard's *Domus and the Megalopolis*⁶ is iconic for the difference it underlines between the mythical time and nature conjured within the idea of the *domus* and the impossibility of its reiteration in the realm of the megalopolis. For Lyotard, the megalopolis, however, as an expression of the contemporary condition, remains haunted by the *domus*, by its time of rhythms and its bucolic *physis*.⁷ In the understanding of these authors, the *domus* represents the myth and the myth is intrinsic to utopia, a relation also described as *uncanny* by Anthony Vidler.⁸ The remnant presence of the desire that surrounds the myth-utopia pair would then be the theme of texts going from Christian Norberg Schultz's *Genius Loci* to Maurice Culot and Leon Krier's *The only path for architecture*,⁹ from Edward Casey's search of the primordial place outside architecture¹⁰ to Kenneth Frampton's similar search within the modern paradigm,¹¹ from the green movement to the policies regarding monument preservation.

Based on the consideration that myth and utopia are related, and that, in the context of a certain disappointment with modernity, this relationship appears as injured, the context of a re-evaluated modernity presents the possibility of a re-consideration of the myth-utopia pair. How is then utopian thinking possible? In architecture, specifically, what are the conditions for the contemporary validity of such discourses?

(London; New York, NY: Verso, 2005), 2–3.

² Ibid., 85.

³ Jean Baudrillard, "America," in *Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Neil Leach (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 1997), 213.

⁴ Rem Koolhaas, "'Life in the Metropolis' or 'The Culture of Congestion,'" in *Architectural Design* vol. 47, no. 5 (August 1977): 319–325.

⁵ Massimo Caciari, "Eupalinos or architecture," in *Architecture theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1998), 409.

⁶ Jean François Lyotard, "Domus and megalopolis," in *Architecture theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1998), 260.

⁷ Ibid., 260.

⁸ Anthony Vidler, "From: *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely*," in *Architecture Theory since 1968*, ed. Michael Hays (Cambridge MA, London, UK : The MIT Press, 1998).

⁹ Maurice Culot and Leon Krier, "The Only Path for Architecture," in *Architecture theory since 1968*, ed. K. Michael Hays (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1998), 349.

¹⁰ Edward Casey, *Getting back into place. Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993).

¹¹ Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points toward an Architecture of Resistance," in *The Anti-aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend WA: Bay Press, 1983).

Without being an analysis *per se*, the present paper tries to propose a model for analyzing such discourses, borrowed from science fiction criticism. The paper focuses first on the concept of event as described by Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin in order to approach it afterwards in accordance with what Darko Suvin calls the conditions for “good” science fiction. These conditions emerge from maintaining the validity of real science as a persistent value of modernity, making possible, within its realm, the re-positioning of utopia and myth, under the auspices of dissolved oppositions as those traditionally involved when discussing the *domus* and the megalopolis, myth–utopia, rural–city, memory–history, nature–culture. The focus of the paper is represented by theoretical texts rather than works of architecture, although some recent projects are discussed from the point of view of the comparisons with the imagery (and not the theory) of science fiction. The final part of the paper suggests a possible analysis of architectural texts appealing to science from the perspective of science-fiction criticism and integrating reflections on these pairs of opposites and their contemporary transformations.

2. Event, memory and urbanity

The introduction previewed a few texts considered emblematic for the association between memory and nature (around the auspices of the *domus*) and the impossibility of its re-iteration in the contemporary city. These texts show that, despite its failure, the myth – in which memory and nature co-exist without conflict – still seems to haunt contemporary minds, creating the paradox, if we were to paraphrase Jean-Luc Nancy,¹² that any attempt to reinvigorate myth, i.e., any utopia, automatically leads to its annihilation. In this case, the question becomes whether there may be another type of association between memory and urbanity, or between nature and civilization, an issue present in certain contemporary discourses, with consequences regarding the way myth and utopia are understood, in an urban context. As such, a selection of programs and manifestos exemplify, in the last part of the paper, the confidence in the city as an expression of the victory of science and rational thinking, the natural element being treated in a subsidiary way, even though it is generally considered an implicit necessity.

The association between urbanity (as an expression of contemporary civilization) and memory is achieved in certain texts via the concept of event borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Walter Benjamin. The Deleuzian event raises the issue of the present in which it occurs and its connection with the past and future in two time modalities,¹³ Chronos and Aion. For Chronos, only the present is real, be it global or partial, while the future and the past are its delirious extensions, which it consumes; for Aion, only the past and future exist: at each instance, they divide the present.¹⁴ Chronos expresses the action of bodies and the creation of bodily

¹² Jean-Luc Nancy, *La communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1999), 11–12.

¹³ James Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008).

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*. (1969). 3rd Edition, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale (London: Continuum, 2004), 187.

qualities, while Aion is the place of outer body events and attributes that differ from qualities. Chronos is limited and infinite, while Aion is unlimited like the past and the future, but finite as the instantaneous moment.¹⁵ However, between the two types of present of Chronos, the impossibility of the present always separated from Aion is just a facade: the instantaneous moment, as a paradoxical element or quasi-cause that crosses through the right line of temporal modality represented by Aion, is the pure moment of pure operation, without depth – a condition necessary to the existence of the bodily present of Chronos.¹⁶ This time doubling can be perceived in language, considering the example of the interpretation of the picture of Marat's death, which puts forward different instances of "to die": either an eternal present of the form "is dying", or a present difficult to perceive, divided between "it will die" and "it is dead". But the fact that Marat dies in the present – in this untraceable moment of the event – makes it possible for the eternal present of "is dying", giving it meaning.¹⁷ The event would therefore be not a recursive thing, resilient to the identification based on the deed, but a singular thing that requires a structure and does not depend on founding identities.¹⁸ Thus, the definition of the event poses the issue of the opposition between the mythical time and the historical time mentioned in the introduction as a premise of the paper and makes possible a further nuance for memory in its relation with the past. If memory and the vegetal were associated to a cyclical, rhythmical time which surrounded the *domus*, the event – as an instantaneous moment, relevant for the eternal present and for the absence of the present altogether – can be the one that triggers the memory. The prolonged time of customs can therefore be forgotten, as Walter Benjamin explains in *One Way Street*, whereas a much shorter instance – because it functions as a shock, as an illumination – persists on the terrain of memory.¹⁹ Despite the fact that urbanity remains interstitial,²⁰ the favourite field of the event that reverberates within memory would be the city. In comparison to it, the suburb can be considered as a place of oblivion, the place of traumatic lack of events and the index of some unknown possibilities.²¹ The event as a source for memory can be removed by the simulacrum that is specific to the representation of memory in the mythical model, situating it in exchange in the realm of the real. Nonetheless, if the perspective on the return of reality is pursued – and implicitly, of the memory on its terrain, a perspective opened by Hal Foster –, today there would be a particular fascination with the traumatic event. Repressed in post-modernity, the event as trauma or abjectness occurs in the contemporary context as an important basis for

¹⁵ Ibid., 188.

¹⁶ Ibid., 191–192.

¹⁷ Williams, *Gilles Deleuze's Logic of Sense*, 145.

¹⁸ Ibid., 34.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, *One-Way Street* (London: Verso, 1979), 342–343.

²⁰ Mark Crinson, pref., *Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City*. Mark Crinson, ed. (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), xi - xx.

²¹ Claire Pajaczkowska, "Urban memory/suburban oblivion," in *Urban Memory: History and Amnesia in the Modern City*, ed. Mark Crinson (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 23–45.

truth, reality and sense²². But positioning the truth in the area of trauma and abjectness determines perils on society, which pushes politics from extreme difference to indifference²³.

Memory can therefore be associated with urbanity. Its occurrence again in the area of the real as carrier of sense and truth is mediated by the event which for memory represents a resourcing, a possible origin. We deal with an origin of another type than the one represented by myth, in the first place due to the possibility of its existence today, unlike the impossibility of reiterating the myth in the contemporary world. If Hal Foster identifies the predilection for the traumatic event based on its incursion in the art world, an exploration of the impact of the event in absence of the trauma is further suggested, maintaining its relation to memory and with the city as an expression of contemporary civilization, exploration occasioned this time by the science fiction literature. Within the context of the contemporary re-evaluation of modernity, the possibility of building a new type of discourse on the relationship between memory and the vegetal element will be reviewed, in comparison with the scientific paradigm postulated by modernity and with utopia.

3. "Good" science-fiction and its criticism

An incursion in the world of science fiction might seem suspicious. On the one hand, because science fiction is difficult to define, as some attempts with tautological nature show. For example, the author and editor Damon Knight claims that science fiction is what it is when we utter the term itself²⁴ whereas Mark C. Glassy states that "we do not know what science fiction is, but we recognize it when we see it."²⁵ However, even if some authors insist on the fictional nature of the genre, it is agreed upon the fact that science fiction is characterized by the existence of a support of fiction based on a realistic speculation on the future, i.e., on a solid knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on the trust in the scientific method of understanding it.²⁶ On the other hand, perhaps exactly due to this understanding of science and the future, in the post-sixties context, there is a feeling of exclusion of the science fiction authors – as far as their acceptance by the "serious" literary critique, but also by the large public²⁷ are concerned. The difficulties in attempting to define science fiction and the feeling of discomfort in relation with its position in the literary culture also derive from the multitude of subcategories that can be outlined inside the genre, from its very occurrence (its beginnings also considered uncertain, but associated by some authors with works of the seventeenth

²² Hal Foster, "The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century," in *The Anti-aesthetic* (New York, NY: The New Press, 1998), 127–170.

²³ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁴ Damon Francis Knight, *In Search of Wonder: Essays on Modern Science Fiction* (Chicago, IL: Advent Publishing, Inc., 1967), xiii.

²⁵ Mark C. Glassy, *The Biology of Science Fiction Cinema* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2001).

²⁶ Robert A. Heinlein et al., "Science Fiction: Its Nature, Faults and Virtues," in *The Science Fiction Novel: Imagination and Social Criticism* (Chicago, IL: Advent Publishers, 1959).

²⁷ Gregory Benford, "Meaning-Stuffed Dreams: Thomas Disch and the future of SF," *New York Review of Science Fiction*, September, Number 121, Volume 11, No. 1 (1998).

century, under the auspices of Cartesian reason). Thus, in *Archaeologies of the Future*, Fredric Jameson speaks about the six subcategories of the genre, warning about the impossibility of their temporal delimitation and about their thematic overlapping.²⁸ Passing from the adventure literature (space opera) derived from the writings of Jules Verne and acclaimed at the beginning of the 20th century, through the speculative fiction of the 1960s and 1970s and arriving at the cyberpunk of the end of last century, the science fiction genre also comprises the representation of the scientific and sociological themes.²⁹

Within this difficult context, the consideration of the science fiction as relevant for the study of possible relations between memory and the vegetal element, on the territory of myth and utopia, mentioned in the beginning of the present paper, is based on the meaning given to the genre by Darko Suvin, literary critic and historian, editor of *Science-Fiction Studies* in the 1970s. He states that in order to talk about science fiction, a sufficient condition is the validation of the new element introduced by works of the genre through the cognitive method of science. The presence of scientific knowledge – not only as hypothesis but as a manifestation of the sign of a method identical with the one proposed by the philosophy of post-Cartesian and post-Bacon science – differentiates science fiction from the supernatural genre of the fantastic and, above all, of the heroic fantasies in a narrow sense.³⁰ This aspect refers both to the exact sciences, and the humanities: anthropology, ethnology, sociology or linguistics are in their turn based on the scientific method, which necessarily implies the possibility of a coherent and immanent explanation of reality.³¹ In science fiction we desire to find real science and not its Platonic mimesis,³² a living social world and not an alienated one. For Suvin, the presence of the scientific method and the condition of a plausible reality explained by it has at least three consequences. Firstly, any innovation from the science fiction world must be judged through the quality of the perspective on the historical and real relationships from within our world; otherwise, it is nothing but an abuse of science fiction. Secondly, in order to handle this relevant twist on reality, without completely annulling its mythological valence – a nuance that remains uncertain for the author – science fiction postulates a mutation of desire, in another topos, another time and with other protagonists. Thirdly, this new chronotope and its characters are relevant due to the manner in which, by being strange to the familiar world of the reader, they still always reflect back to his or her world.³³

It is interesting here to make a comparison between the manner of understanding utopia – and, through it, myth, as described in the introduction – and the definition of science

²⁸ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 93.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Darko Suvin, "The State of the Art in Science Fiction Theory: Determining and Delimiting the Genre," *Science Fiction Studies*, Number 17, Volume 6, 1st Part, March 1979, <http://www.depauw.edu/sfs/backissues/17/suvin17.htm> (accessed 22.06.2013)

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

fiction proposed by Darko Suvin. If in the first case, returning to the myth was impossible from the place of fulfilled utopia which described the crisis and the statics of things and questioned the scientific method, here, the image of the future and of the new, if not of utopia, is possible precisely because the science is still viable, within its rational framework. Moreover, the science fiction world returns from the positions of this alienation, of this migration of the desire, towards the real world to which it suggests plausible continuations. It is thus situated outside a temporal block, making it possible for reality to be seen within a temporal frame that includes the past and the future perspective, unconflictually, as Suvin³⁴ notices. This occurs without altering the reality as reality. Unlike the simulacra under the form of which memory and the natural element occur in a reality deprived of the horizon of the megalopolis, science fiction insists on the real and the plausible, making use of the validity of science. Within the crisis of modernity, the **new element** – the novelty of science fiction Suvin calls *novum* – is thus positioned among some examples of the literary genre, as a solution for this crisis: it is the event, maybe in a Deleuzian sense, that makes the future possible, re-establishing the validity of historical temporality, with its possible cyclicity, accepted within the model of modern science and rationality.

Such an example is commented by Fredric Jameson in the last chapter – dedicated to the “Mars” trilogy – from the already quoted work, *Archaeologies of the Future*. The comment owes Suvin its theoretic framework – to whom Jameson acknowledges the originality as a theoretician of science fiction, as well as of utopia. In Jameson’s opinion, this originality consists not only of having brought together the two genres, but also of having associated them to the alienation effect of modernity, without denying them or neutralizing their implications on reality, through the support of the method of scientific knowledge.³⁵

Thus, following Jameson, Kim Stanley Robinson’s trilogy about the terra-forming of Mars, first confirms the hypothesis embraced by the ones who believe, like Suvin, that science fiction is first of all, about science. Moreover, the data and scientific facts do not occur as abstract and contemplative traits of epistemology, but as data and materials used in solving real problems.³⁶ They are viewed by Fredric Jameson as allegories of the over-determination for social, political and historical problems which the new inhabitants of planet Mars must handle. The story of terra-forming becomes a pretext for reciprocal issues of human nature and collectivity for which science represents the path of mediation. So, any scientific lecture of the trilogy must develop itself eventually “into a second allegorical lecture in which the rough [scientific] content of science fiction occurs as a social – political one, or in other terms, as utopian”.³⁷ At this point, Fredric Jameson analyzes the meeting between the real and the modern on one side, and the utopian, on the other, meeting that the trilogy makes possible. The explanation of this possibility resides in the time of the space novel, a time of “emergent qualities”, “an unexpected and difficult to predict” time situated between geology and biology,

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 410.

³⁶ Ibid., 394.

³⁷ Ibid., 396.

between rock and plant, among the craters of meteorites and villages of tents – a time of myth, it could be said – that is, or begins to be, secretly, historical.³⁸

There are many fragments of the three-volume novel in which the landscapes of the planet are described through their colours, red, then green and blue in the last volume. The emergence of life, the transformation from red into green achieved by the first one hundred colonists, who, by means of longevity treatments, live over two hundred years, is accompanied by the forming of the memories of these people and of their oblivion while longevity thus prolonged reaches its limits. Terra-forming becomes an occasion for retroactive inclusion of all aspects of human life, delineating two possibilities into one: while production needs a pre-existent life form to operate, the being occurs in the space in which production is limited, in which there is a chance for new origins to occur – origins which time and history erase in an inexorable manner³⁹. The utopia of an evolved society to which the last volume of the trilogy is dedicated is possible from this point, which, on the path of science, restores the unity memory – nature symbolized in the Arcadian myth, reiterating it, within the parameters of the real.

In order to make a last remark on the way in which utopia occurs in the example commented by Jameson, the author lingers on Hiroko and Ann, two allegoric characters of the trilogy, symbolizing the pro and con positions concerning the terra-forming process. Once arrived on Mars, Ann falls in love with the red planet deploring its transformation by humans; from the philosophical point of view, she represents an anti-humanist alternative to ontology. On the contrary, Hiroko as a botanist who loves life, besides the leader of the green movement, becomes a certain type of mythical character, a goddess of the planet, a prophet.⁴⁰ Though, as a spiritual leader of the greens, her character has an ideological sense comparable to that of Ann. If the ecologist movement is green on Earth, it can be easily understood, Jameson says, that on Mars, Ann's extreme position, with her desire of death – the pristine condition of the red planet – would qualify as green. On the red planet, the greens would therefore become the party of the progress in its evil sense, whereas the real greens would be red and would fight for the natural state of the planet, this time, in the sense of its complete inorganic feature.⁴¹ Beyond this doubling of the utopia that occasions the terra-forming from the Mars trilogy, Jameson identifies a full plethora of possible utopias (social, political, economic) occasioned by the (re-)generating event of terra-forming – utopias that put an end to some modernity postulates such as patriarchy and property. "It is a success that must be always renewed"⁴² and at the same time a polyphonic utopia – so not one, but several – found however in the stage of conjecture, as long as the book does not provide the reader with these utopias within the narrative. This issue remains though the expression of the deepest utopian

³⁸ Ibid., 400–401.

³⁹ Ibid., 403.

⁴⁰ Kim Stanley Robinson, *Mars Trilogy* (New York, NY: Random House, Spectra, 1992).

⁴¹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 411 - 412.

⁴² Ibid., 416.

spirit, because its form is not, according to Jameson, the representation of radical alternatives, but the imperative of imagining them.⁴³

Based on Fredric Jameson's comments on the Mars trilogy, along with the theoretical formulations of Darko Suvin, the possibility of the science fiction utopia occurs as a reverse intercession to the impossibility of utopia, which was formulated as a premise in the introduction of the paper. The incursion in the science fiction world shows that the utopia is still possible as an expression of modernity as long as the postulates of the latter are not considered exhausted. If the scientific method remains a success of modernity, although politics, ideology, economy and society in general are in crisis, there is the possibility of imagining a social – political future on the foundations of science. From Jules Verne to Carl Sagan, the confirmed enthusiasm of those who speculated on the future, seems to keep alive not only the desire (paraphrasing the title of Jameson's book), but also the hope in the very plausibility of the reiteration of the Arcadian myth. The myth appears then in its splendid reality which – precisely because it is real – makes the force-fitted development possible, not of one utopia but of a plethora of possible imaginings of the future. Still, to exit from the stasis, besides the sufficient condition of the viability of the scientific method, a supplementary condition is required – that of alienation. We must depart from Earth in order to be able to return to it,⁴⁴ Jameson argues how, by comparison to Mars, the home planet appears splendid and great in the eyes of the colonists. The idea of alienation, of estrangement, is also present among the three conditions suggested by Suvin when discussing the good quality science fiction. Carl Sagan, in the *Cosmos* documentary of the 1970s makes a somewhat similar intercession. The incursion in the mineral cosmos is accompanied by returns in the core of the terrestrial organic, which, by its structural representation, at the level of the atom is the cosmos itself on a minuscule scale:⁴⁵ it is a continuous round trip between the exploration and the imagining of the unknown that makes possible not only the representation of the origin but also the imagining of new beginnings.

4. The model of the critical apparatus regarding science fiction applied in architectural theories

At this point, the problem of alienation as a condition for science fiction also brings about the problem of fiction. In order to once again speak of a state of beatitude – a feeling of (possibly) fulfilled utopia – such as the one experienced by Maya overflying the waters of Mars – who says, touched already by the nostalgia of the passing of the experienced moment, as well as by the emotion of waiting for the next moment: "I am alive again"⁴⁶ – the event represented by the terra-forming appears as a necessary condition in the Mars trilogy. Plausible in the science

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 399.

⁴⁵ Carl Sagan, *Cosmos* [DVD]. (London: Freemantle Media Enterprises, 1980).

⁴⁶ Kim Stanley Robinson, *Red Mars* (New York, NY: Random House, Spectra, 1992), 425.

fiction reality and related to the event in the Deleuzian sense,⁴⁷ however, in the contemporary world, at least at such a scale, it remains *to happen*.

However, even in the absence of such important events, the critical apparatus formulated by Darko Suvin can be a model for a similar critical apparatus applicable to those utopian discourses from the realm of architectural theory which propose utopias whose sufficient condition is science. The architecture made possible through the model of chemistry from the *Organics* manifesto of William Katavolos,⁴⁸ the seven theses of Konrad Wachsmann that support a new architecture following the model of the machine, or the project for an aerial architecture of Werner Ruhnau and Yves Klein,⁴⁹ are (if not waiting for the event), susceptible to such a critical assessment, of a judgment through the quality of the perspective opened on historical and real relationships from inside our world. Otherwise, paraphrasing Darko Suvin, they would just as well be only an abuse – architectural and not literary this time – of science fiction. On the other hand, discourses such as those of Yona Friedman, Bernard Preel or Pierre Riboulet raise a question concerning the order of the event. The replacement of industry with agriculture in the cities is one of the principles uttered by Yona Friedman for the urbanism of the future⁵⁰; Bernard Preel offers as alternative to bringing nature in the city, following in the footsteps of Ebenezer Howard, the idea of bringing the city in nature,⁵¹ whereas Pierre Riboulet militates for repairing the urban scars by rediscovering a harmonious relationship with nature, through a human and urban ecology that can give birth to a city of liberated time.⁵² But, in this case, the mediation procedure of alienation is missing – which is the triggering event for creating the conditions for a new beginning.

More visible than architectural texts, some contemporary buildings trigger our Sci-Fi inflamed imagination. It is not uncommon to see general comparisons between architecture and science-fiction used to achieve an amusing effect, underlying the un-earthly, un-seen before “looks” of a building. In an article describing Zaha Hadid's New Library in Vienna, subtitled “A Star Destroyer from George Lucas's fevered imagination, perhaps?”, John Metcalfe does not come short of science fiction examples to describe the architect's work:

⁴⁷ Leonard Lawlor, “The beginnings of Thought: The Fundamental Experience in Derrida and Deleuze,” in *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, eds. Paul Patton and John Protevi (London; New York, NY: Continuum, 2003), 80–84.

⁴⁸ William Katavolos, “Organics,” in *Programs and manifestos on 20th-century architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1971), 163–164.

⁴⁹ Werner Ruhnau and Yves Klein, “Project for an aerial architecture,” in *Programs and manifestos on 20th-century architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1971), 171.

⁵⁰ Yona Friedman, “The Ten Principles of Town Planning,” in *Programs and manifestos on 20th-century architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1971), 183–184.

⁵¹ Bernard Préel, “L'après-ville,” in *Le monde des villes*, ed. Thierry Paquot (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1996).

⁵² Pierre Riboulet, *La ville comme oeuvre* (Paris: Pavillon de l'Arsenal, 1994).

“When Zaha Hadid envisions a building, she likes to go big on concept and design. Bow down before her “Watergate on steroids” in Beijing, for instance, or imagine the clouds parting under the nuclear thrusters of this Japanese stadium/mothership.”⁵³

However, the kind of rhetoric employed in such texts alludes to the mere imagery of science fiction, in its pop-culture, cinema forms. It does not support the analysis proposed by Darko Suvin in neither of its proposed steps. The scientific paradigm is not in itself an essential issue, neither are its consequences. If theoretical texts like those previously discussed are to be transported and transformed into self-standing projects, the imagery of Sci-Fi would be a secondary aspect of this transposition. Sticking to the theory is what may show not only the difficulty of the birth of such projections, but their very status within the larger envisioning of utopia.

Without further overflying other architectural discourses that could be submitted to the theoretical sketch analogous to the one formulated by Suvin, a grill of analysis rather than an analysis *per se* is suggested in the paper. It is suitable for those utopian discourses that further concern ways of reforming modern urbanism, involving – this time inside the paradigm – the Arcadian myth (if it were to maintain Fredric Jameson’s assertion concerning the relationship myth–utopia as valid). Concluding in the vicinity of the American author, a conjunction of this model can be made and suggested by the science fiction world, borrowing from it analysis criteria applicable to different architectural discourses, as shown in the paper. If urbanity remains the expression of contemporary civilization, built on the belief anchored in modernity that it represents, “the victory of the cunning of the peasant in his fight with the land”⁵⁴ and so, the place of his memory is still valid in the paradigm of rationality, in the meantime, nature remains alone on the other side of desire, of the passion for myth. Modernity still present in urbanity manifests itself (also) through the path of the trust in rationality, in the validity of science, but, at the same time, it the event. If the event is not cataclysmic and does not project a dystopian future, then there is space for utopia as a reiteration of the origin, of the myth, such as Robinson’s terra-forming. There is a possibility that a plethora of utopias can appear, maybe confirming the exact potency of the reality of the pristine meeting between the organic world of the vegetal and the city that embraced rationality. Then Jameson’s sentence not only reverses the place of the human being and of the city from the words of Yahweh towards Abraham, reducing the saving number, already reduced, from fifty – to ten – to one; his subtitle summarizes the place of the city in the contemporary world and the stake of verifying utopia which the city implies:

“If I Can Find One Good City, I Will Spare the Man.”⁵⁵

⁵³ John Metcalfe, *Zaha Hadid’s New Library in Vienna Looks Like a Looming Deathship*. Oct. 9th, 2013, in CityLab, <http://www.citylab.com/design/2013/10/zaha-hadids-new-library-vienna-looks-star-destroyer/7182/>

⁵⁴ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (1938). ed. Bryan Stanley Turner (London: Routledge, 1998), 3.

⁵⁵ Jameson, *Archeologies of the future*, 393.

5. Conclusions

Architecture and utopia, as a pair, remains today, after the crisis of modernity, a sensible association. The paper tries to show how the science fiction model may set a few conditions for its possible re-iteration. Far from the realm of imagery, where science fiction and architecture sometimes meet today, SF criticism provides a set of conditions for “good” utopian architecture. First, it is a question of model: the stress is on the validity of science, in extrapolation, on the validity of certain aspects of rational thinking, still held valid in the contemporary re-assessment of modern values. If rationality is the general framework for the possibility of imagining a utopian city, the next three conditions present themselves as more specific and present themselves as a consecutive set of rules. The rational paradigm must first produce innovation, the *novum*. The quality of this novelty is verified by whether it produces the so-called estrangement movement (the second condition) and implicitly, by whether it is relevant to the present (third condition). This consequential set of conditions brings forward two possible conclusions to a utopian way of thinking architecture today.

First, linking myth and utopia, the model of science fiction criticism offers the framework for a continuity of association between myth and utopia within the western tradition of values – rational thinking and the merits of science. This conclusion is bi-directional. On the one hand, it comes to stress the fact that contemporary architectural criticism, like other trends in cultural theory, is in a process of re-evaluation towards modernity. On the other hand, the fact that there is a continuity in tradition, making a renewed association between myth and utopia possible, may constitute a proof for this contemporary trend, for which Fredric Jameson’s voice – an important voice in postmodern theory as well as in contemporary re-evaluations of modernity and post-modernity alike – is an important pillar for the paper’s thesis.

A second conclusion on the proposed association between myth and utopia in contemporary architecture more specifically relates to the criteria science fiction provides for the analysis of such associations. In this sense, what is important to conclude here regards the term “fiction” in SF, rather than the “science” one. The idea of novelty, with its estrangement effect and re-endorsement of present conditions may represent an act of faith in architecture’s capacity of postulating essential discourses for contemporary aspects of life. The fact of providing these discourses with a set of criteria for their evaluation may be itself part of the process of re-investing in the role of architecture as a realm of continuity and perpetual innovation.

While utopia remains a place of prudence for the contemporary, after modern disappointments, the example of science fiction can be – in the case of architecture theory – a realm for possible encounters between myth and the future, of possible trust in projections built on the paradigm of modern science. While waiting for the triggering event, one can still hypothesize on the relevance of such utopia for the present.