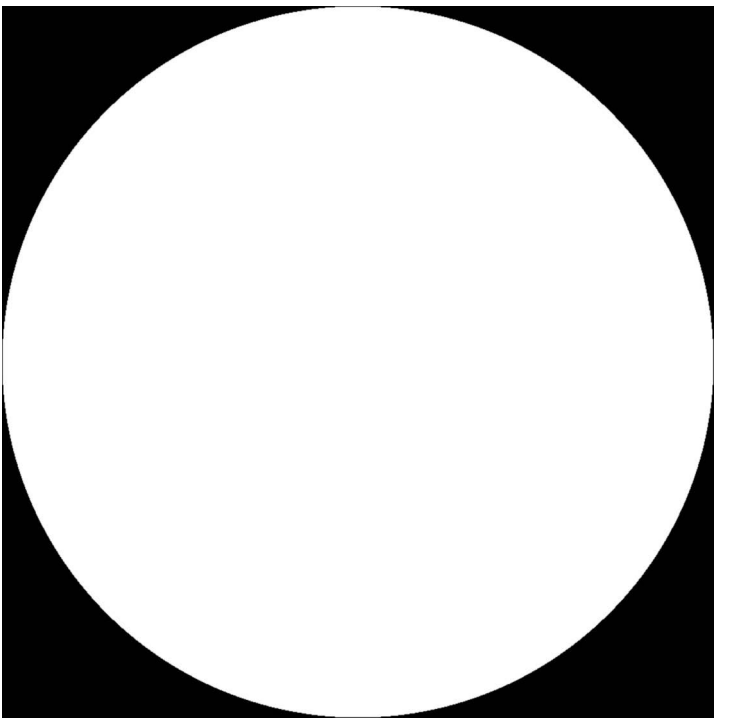
5 Space-Times of Control: Problem-Solving Utopianisms



"Strong architecture for strong men" (Jormakka 2011b, p. 72).

5.1 Degenerate Utopias: Utopianism and the Disavowal of Crisis

Marked by a 24/7 flow of information, simultaneity, immediacy, sped-up mobility, unbound space, and an unlimited flow of goods, globalisation, or rather the specific form it takes, namely globalised neoliberalism, unfolds within the ahistorical temporality of presentism. Space now seems meaningless, as the narrative of globalism goes, evoking the impression that space could now be annihilated by time. However, ever since neoliberalism started to develop, it did so in a very geographical and geographically dependent way. Leaving very physical traces, the global restructuring of cities, for example, can be seen as a direct reflection of the worldwide political economic restructurings which started at the end of the 20th century.

While architecture and urbanisation have since the very beginning shared an intimate connection with capitalism, under neoliberalism this is taken to a heightened form. For example, while previously predominantly driven by the state, urban development today is increasingly financed by private transnational elites. The primary interest in land and the built environment therefore lies in the extraction of capital (often even when owned by the state, as it too increasingly behaves in an entrepreneurial fashion). In this context architecture serves as a pivotal tool for the endless cycle of capital accumulation in which surplus value is created to be reinvested again elsewhere. This leads to the extensification and intensification of capital, or 'the frontiers of capital' as defined by Marx, in which capital extends into uncharted territories or intensifies production (Yarina 2017). The latter results in an ongoing increase in value and financial speculation of land and the real estate market, in which the built environment is primarily rendered as commodity. This affects cities in various ways, for example, by growing unequal distribution of capital (leaving some areas over-invested in and others neglected) or through the expulsion of lower income inhabitants in previously affordable areas, also known as gentrification. Capital thus acts disruptively in very obvious but also far more subtle ways. Furthermore, since capital has to continuously discover new terrains for capital extraction,

its repercussions are constantly changing. As a progressively aggressive force its effects extend to the precariousness of labour, new means of production, the development of new markets and bigger pressure on the natural environment, which is why capital is often linked to imperialist and neocolonial endeavours (Harvey 2008).

Since architecture's value is now increasingly dependent on its exchange value rather than its use value, accommodation is often no longer the most important task of architecture. "You don't have to live in these apartments to love Vienna. Owning them will do." (Citing a marketing slogan, Heindl 2019, p. 125) said the inscription of an inner-city construction site in Vienna in the year 2011. The same can be said for public space, which increasingly serves economic aims such as setting the stage for consumerism or attracting investment from companies, builders, buyers, and visitors. This leads to a decrease in accessibility which, however, is *the* key feature of public space. "The more accessible a place, the more public it becomes." (Madanipour 2019, p. 45) Accessibility is therefore a prerequisite for diversity and inclusion and its decrease an indicator of shrinking democracies.

These developments were supported by an ongoing intellectual shift in architectural critical thought (or the intended resignation thereof) starting at the end of the 20th century. Architects since allegedly abandon any pretensions to change the world (exemplified in Rem Koolhaas' 'realist cynicism') and aim at connecting architecture with the 'real' challenges of its time instead – "[t]o 'solve', not to 'problematize'" (Fischer 2012, p. 58). Architectural practice has hence transformed into an ideology of realism, pragmatism, and an "obsessive matter-of-factness, or a non-critical embrace of global capitalism." (Coleman 2005, p. 6) Members of this 'post-criticality' or 'post-theory' movement aim at "recasting hyper-conformity [to neoliberal globalisation] as a supposedly subversive tactic for overloading the system, by intensifying its contradictions in the belief that they will become glaringly obvious, thereby bringing them to the point of crumbling." (Coleman 2020, p. 220, own insertion) Instead of evoking contradictions, however, the architectural object has gained a sudden prominent cultural status in society, transforming into an identity-forming experience. True to the

logic of commodity culture, the fetishisation of the object has fully extended onto buildings and elevated architects to *starchitects*. Enforced by a rising significance of the visual in mediatised society, "architectural design is reduced to the superficial play of empty, seductive forms, and philosophy is appropriated as an intellectual veneer to justify these forms." (Leach cited in Karbasioun 2018, p. 108) Practices reducing buildings to their visual appearance try to perpetuate architecture as an autonomous, self-referential discipline in which architecture is abstracted and de-contextualised. "If such practice is guided by theory, it is theory of the traditional type, based on the model of the natural sciences, which attempts to develop universal and systematic methods removed from the vagaries of the particular" (Awan et al. 2011, p. 29), such as parametrics, for example.

Through this uncritical embrace of globalised neoliberalism, architectural design and the building industry have become fully incorporated into the global competitive market. Architects who now act as globalised professionals, compete for projects on a worldwide market, thereby no longer limited to the immediate vicinities but stretched out across the entire planet. This, on the one hand, results in a division of labour in which "Western 'design architects' often produce the massing, concept and promotional renderings for a foreign project before handing off the design drawings to a local architect to translate them into construction documents." (Yarina 2017, p. 245) On the other, it further enforces the process of globalisation, in which social, political as well as spatial dimensions become increasingly homogenised. Built on the premises of inevitability (which bears striking resemblance to a *grand narrative*), time is turned into a singular determined trajectory (that of the West/ the 'developed world') and space depicted as a temporal sequence (the countries of the Global South are 'lacking behind'/ 'developing'). In this logic, other forms of development are foreclosed and the particular disregarded (Massey 2005).

This presents space with a rather confusing paradox. While in the process of globalisation the particular of localised contexts is disregarded in favour of increasingly homogenised and standardised solutions, design nevertheless is meant to distinguish cities from one

another, which too now compete on a global scale. However, while iconic architecture presents itself as radical innovation and a tool for globalised individualisation (for cities as well as their inhabitants), its radicality is restricted to the conformity of technology and the intensification of existing conditions. In globalised (st)architecture, "[e]xisting conditions are accentuated […] to obscure simple reproduction of *what is* in an extreme form." (Coleman 2020, p. 220, original emphasis) Such architecture thus serves as the ultimate celebration of globalised culture, reproducing spaces of "an ever-intensifying urban present, instead of a radically different future." (Picon 2013a, p. 22) In this contemporary consumerist ideology, as in any ideology, "[w]hat is consumed is always 'new', but this novelty is a mere difference in time that signals the eternal return of the same." (Thompson 1982, p. 620) Any change is an internal change of the (ideological, neoliberal) system and thus results in a reinforced version of existing reality. As Harvey states, iconic architecture simply has to present itself as "unique and particular *enough*" (Harvey cited in Yarina 2017, p. 244, emphasis by Harvey).

As a symbolic asset and commodity at once, architecture is thus meant to attract and manufacture desire through its iconicity. Since desire here is however tied to consumerism, real desire is oppressed, while commodified desire has to continually be fed. As mentioned, it is however not fed by true novelty or alternativity but produced from within the existing framework. Imagination is thus restrained to the infinite space of consumerism. Further increasingly owned and maintained privately, globalised capitalised space hence assumes very specific characteristics. It presents itself as decontextualised, well-ordered, non-conflictual, ahistorical, inward-focused, sanitised, secure, controlled, under surveillance, tied to consumption and property rights. As such, it bears striking resemblance to the characteristics of traditional utopias.

In his analysis of Disneyland, Louis Marin was the first to describe this kind of idealised and capitalised space as a materialised utopia, for which he introduced the term *Degenerate Utopia*. As an actually existing place it "alienates the visitor by a distorted and fantasmatic representation of daily life, […] of what is estranged and what is familiar: comfort, welfare, consumption, scientific and technological progress, super-

power, and morality." (Marin 1984, p. 240) David Harvey and other scholars (Harvey 2000; Olkowski 2007; Suvin 2010) have further extended the term to places outside of Disneyland, realising that they have become a dominant part of commodified city life: Escapist and compensatory places where life is presented in a fetishised and illusionary manner.

The *Disneyfication*[1] of the built environment can range from subtle gentrified (semi-)public spaces to very outspoken forms with walls and fences. Such places can include shopping malls, shopping districts, corporate spaces, gated communities, segregated suburbs, or large-scale development projects. As such they all assume the spatial qualities mentioned above. Here, the right to the city is overruled by the ability to pay. Tied to specific rules and regulations, they represent supposedly harmonious places, in which political difference is repressed through surveillance and control. They are representations of authorities and police order where ideology is, through the help of iconic architecture, transformed into myth and collective commodified fantasy. "Their organization and functioning may well be symptomatic of the entire society of control [which] has masked itself as a site of freedom and equality" (Olkowski 2007, p. 184, own insertion). As a rupture to everyday life, they infantilise us, thereby alienating us from meaningful cohabitation.

A further means of control and alienation is created by a sensory addiction to a compensatory reality through the increasing reliance on technicity and illusion, or *technoaesthetics*.[2] "In a time dominated by spectacle in culture and politics, every new developmental stage of technology brings about a new mode of alienation of the corporeal

1 *Disneyfication* is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the transformation (as of something real or unsettling) into carefully controlled and safe entertainment or an environment with similar qualities" ("Disneyfication." Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Disneyfication. Accessed 20/02/2022).

2 *Aesthetics* here refers to the original Greek *aisthesis* meaning *perception by feeling*. Thus, the "'field of aesthetics is not art but reality' in a corporeal and material sense." (With reference to Buck-Morss, Andreotti and Lahiji 2017, p. 80)

sensorium." (Andreotti and Lahiji 2017, p. 144)[3] As illusionary appearances such spaces create a blurred distinction between the real and the imagined and therefore alienate us from our bodily senses and our surroundings. "The underlying operations of control affiliated with desire, fear, and the promise of enjoyment are always and inevitably predicated on the impossibility of the subject establishing a firm place from which to make sense of one's world" (with reference to Dean, ibid., p. 129).

Because this kind of space "pre-empts any alternative imagination, any fertile possibility of a radical otherness" (Suvin 2010, p. 394), iconic architecture is frequently depicted as anti-utopian.[4] The possibility of a different future is foreclosed, which means that no other time and space than that of the celebrated present is rendered possible. However, this, in fact, makes it *entirely utopian* in its *traditional* sense. To recollect:

> [Blueprint u]topias are not marked by multiplicities of time and space for they are representations of an ideal and ultimate time and space, achieved once and for all. Utopia [in its traditional sense] […] 'is not the fairyland where all wishes are fulfilled. Utopia fulfils only *one* wish: the wish of seeing things and people identical to their concept' (citing Rancière, Dikeç 2012, p. 671, emphasis by Rancière, own insertions).

3 According to Libero Andreotti and Nadir Lahiji, technical manipulation has however further intensified and since developed from the spectacle to *phantasmagorias*. These define "a new stage of capitalist totalization in which every aspect of life is reconstructed to align with a new set of normative trajectories that tie it into the tempo, the operations, and the new spatial coordinates of markets and information networks." (ibid., p. 127)

4 This is the case for those who understand utopia as a method and systemic alternative. For those with an understanding of utopia as an unrealistic ideal, such architecture is defined as anti-utopian because it refers to the 'real' world. Since utopianism in this book is defined as the expression of human flourishing, *anti-utopianism* refers to the philosophy of a *non-pursuit* of a better life, meaning any action resulting in insignificance rather than contribution to human flourishing. See the glossary or next subchapter *5.2 Junkspace: Anti-Utopianism and Omni-Crisis* for a closer examination.

The sort of architecture which fixes concepts to representation in time and space therefore *produces blueprint utopias **in form***. Furthermore, even if the envisioned society is simply an intensified version of the present, such forms of architecture attempt at contributing to a better life, nevertheless. The production of spectacular architecture is therefore never motivated by money alone, but by an additional factor: "To make architecture is to take part in – to imitate and compete, or to emulate – this endeavour of making perfect work" (Verschaffel 2012, p. 166).[5] Any production of (such) iconic architecture can be seen as a motivated effort in making a significant contribution to society and therefore is ultimately informed by some kind of utopianism. If uncritical architects depict themselves as 'realist cynics', then the only thing they are *really* cynical about, is architecture as a tool for *systemic* change – not, however, architecture as a frame for providing the good life. What has changed is thus not the assumption that architecture would no longer contribute to human flourishing, but the outlook on *how* this would be achieved. It is not that utopianism has disappeared; it is more that it has *changed*.

The noteworthy shift in the way betterment is believed to occur can be observed in society at large: human flourishing is no longer set in the realm of the political or social, but in that of the *cultural*. In addition, culture today is being increasingly linked to technology, while technology assumes the role of culture in its own right (Harvey 1996). This sort of utopianism thus attempts at contributing to better life *through design*. It is the building, its form, its visual appearance, which is rendered as the answer to making life 'better' – most notably, through the help of technology. Social issues are hence formulated as 'problems' to be 'solved' which in architecture renders the finished building as the 'solution'. For this reason, this book refers to this kind of thinking as *problem-solving utopianisms*. Ultimately, this must also be the reason for the architect's stardom: it is *(s)he* who bring this better life upon us.

Furthermore, it can be noted, that this form of commodified myth-making is not restricted to buildings alone but extends to any form of

5 The inherent link between architecture and making perfect work is further explored in *6.2 Rethinking Architectural Education*.

representation (visual or text) and performances (behaviours, events, and festivals). Architecture critic Davide T. Ferrando (2016b), for example, has noted a rising popularity in animated videos as a new communication tool for architectural projects. He particularly refers to a striking method of visualisation in which buildings are conjured out of nothing, construction elements floating in mid-air, magically assembling themselves into spectacular sculptures.[6] Not only is this a very direct and double form of *Disneyfication*, but it also obfuscates the hard work, labour and material procurement that actually goes into creating such buildings. Most strikingly, it delineates the architectural product from its social and political context, celebrating it, once again, as a spectacular and innovative cultural product.

However, as has been mentioned, if the general trend of globalisation is marked by a process of homogenisation in which no true novelty is created, then this presents us with the paradoxical situation in which any attempt at individualisation eventually amounts to homogenisation. This means that the process of identity construction simultaneously creates the city without qualities. In the attempt of distinguishing themselves from each other on the outside, cities therefore level down internally (with reference to Löw, Meier 2011; see also Faschingeder et al. 2011). For Manuel Castells this means creating architecture so neutral, clean and transparent that it actually does not stand for anything specific, but stays open to various coded interpretations (Castells 2017). However, what kind of space are we left with, when any production of novelty ends up perpetuating sameness? Does the absorption of uniqueness then not amount into a totality of an eternally present, universalised space?

6 In his article Davide T. Ferrando refers to a video project in which he compiled such animated presentations (see Ferrando 2016a). It includes visualisations of the Hudson Yards, BIG's Dry Line in Manhattan, as well as projects by Herzog & De Meuron, Daniel Libeskind, Snøhetta, and Zaha Hadid architects.

5.2 Junkspace: Anti-Utopianism and Omni-Crisis

"People in search of a presentist experience need only look around them at certain cityscapes, replicated across the globe, for which the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas has invented the concept 'Generic City,' associated with the notion of 'Junkspace'. This is where presentism is really at home, eating up space and reducing or banishing time." (Hartog 2017, p. xix)

If utopianism is the pursuit of a *better* society, then *anti-utopianism* refers to its implicit as well as explicit *non-pursuit*.[7] It is a philosophy of *non-improvement*, founded either on the idea that betterment is not rendered possible (which links it closely to cynicism and nihilism) and/or on the idea that the worst has already happened (assuming that the present as it is, is already the final and achieved utopia). In both cases it serves an ahistorical and presentist end of history logic. People supporting this view often refer to the achievement of unprecedented global wealth and political rights, conveniently disregarding the growing gap between rich and poor or the discrepancy between social and political liberties. The arguments often touch upon how far we as human beings have come and that we ought to be satisfied and thankful for what we have got (or, on a more irritated note, *don't you have something better to whine about?*). Evidently, the only people defending this perspective are privileged ones, either because they are blind and/or ignorant to the deep-seated conflicts of society, feel discriminated against,[8] or because they want to perpetuate their supremacy. While, in the latter case, they would no longer pursue utopianism on the level of a broad *society*, they would very well pursue improvement of their *personal* situation. This reveals that not only utopianism has been detached from social and political endeavours but has also largely become individualised and therefore no longer concerned

7 Note that it is not necessarily *dystopian*. See glossary entry for *dystopia*.

8 There is a frequently cited saying going "When you are accustomed to privilege, equality feels like discrimination." (Original source or person who coined the phrase is unknown; there are however various references on the internet. Depending on the context, the word *discrimination* is frequently replaced by *oppression*).

with society as such. *Anti-utopianism* is thus the unquestioned acceptance of the current state of affairs with no motivation to improve them 'for the greater good', neither on a socio-political, nor on a cultural level. In architecture this translates into unmotivated spaces, endlessly reproducing the presentist experience, where any action results in insignificance rather than human flourishing.

In architecture theory and beyond, this kind of space has been attributed to the notion of Rem Koolhaas' *Junkspace* (Koolhaas 2002) as well as Marc Augé's *non-place* (Augé 1995). As for Augé, who is speaking from an anthropological perspective, *supermodernity* increasingly produces places stripped of any identity, context, and history but in which human beings nevertheless spend more and more of their time. These are "spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality" (ibid., p. 87), of which the traveller's space marks the archetype. Whereas the "'[a]nthropological place' is formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living know-how; non-place creates shared identity of passengers, customers or Sunday drivers." (ibid., p. 101) This shared identity however is only shared temporarily and in fact marked by identity-loss and role-playing, therefore not creating any relations – only solitude and similitude. Non-places harbour a homogenised mass of isolated individuals, separated in their sameness.

In a similar vein, also *Junkspace* is described as a product of our time. "Junkspace is what remains after modernization has run its course […], its fallout." (Koolhaas 2002, p. 175) It is characterised by continuity and endless expansion, an infinite interior continuum of homogenised space. "[A]ir-conditioning […] has truly revolutionized architecture. Air-conditioning has launched the endless building. If architecture separates buildings, air-conditioning unites them." (ibid., 176) Furthermore, *Junkspace* is marked by endless maintenance and flexibility: it is constantly rebuilt to stay essentially the same. It is space without form, without design, without memory. "Junkspace cannot be remembered." (ibid., 177)

Notably, both Augé's *non-place* and Koolhaas' *Junkspace* represent spaces *devoid* of utopia, or spaces of *anti-utopianism*. For Augé, "[t]he

non-place is the opposite of utopia" (Augé 1995, p. 111), since collective society no longer exists, only commodified individuals. To Koolhaas, "[c]hange has been divorced from the idea of improvement. There is no progress" (Koolhaas 2002, p. 178), meaning *Junkspace* is motivated by market needs alone. Augé's *non-places* are equivalent to Koolhaas' *Junkspace* in that they both are emptied out of any trace of history and context, creating an eternal present in which the only time measured is clock-time.[9] They both create a universal space standing in discontinuity with traditional urban contexts and the memory of the past. "There is no room there for history unless it has been transformed into an element of spectacle, usually in allusive texts. What reigns there is actuality, the urgency of the present moment." (Augé 1995, p. 103)

These descriptions of time and space seem to reflect the general experience of the modern subject within philosophy in which subjectivity increasingly correlates with 'negation' (with reference to Ubl, Meier 2011).[10] While the experiences of time and space which started to develop within modernity are still relevant today, these have since further transformed and intensified under globalised neoliberalism. In a need for revision, Hardt and Negri have updated such analysis through a Marxist

9 Augé for example states "[s]ince non-places are there to be passed through, they are measured in units of time" (Augé 1995, p. 104) while simultaneously saying that "[e]verything proceeds as if space had been trapped by time, as if there were no history" (ibid.).

10 Interestingly, this is also reflected in the German translation of Koolhaas' text *The Generic City* (Koolhaas 1998 [1995]). The translation of the title into *Die Stadt ohne Eigenschaften* (Koolhaas 1996), meaning 'the city without qualities', strongly reminds one of Robert Musil's novel *The Man without Qualities*. Also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri make reference to Musil's novel in saying it would reflect modernity's inherent contradiction: "For the philanthropists of Musil's world there is a conflict at the center of modernity between, on the one hand, the immanent forces of desire and association, the love of the community, and on the other, the strong hand of an overarching authority that imposes and enforces an order on the social field." (Hardt and Negri 2003, p. 69) All these texts (of the socio-spatial, philosophico-political as well as literary genre) thus confirm in some way or other the aforementioned negation in the experience of the modern subject.

lens in their description of *Empire*. *Empire* here does not stand in for a direct metaphor, but a concept introduced to describe a new regime that acts as a headless authority, encompassing the totality of time and space:

> First and foremost, then, the concept of Empire posits a regime that effectively encompasses the spatial totality […] Second, the concept of Empire presents itself not as a historical regime originating in conquest, but rather as an order that effectively suspends history and thereby fixes the existing state of affairs for eternity. From the perspective of Empire, this is the way things will always be and the way they were always meant to be. In other words, Empire presents its rule not as a transitory moment in the movement of history, but as a regime with no temporal boundaries and in this sense outside of history or at the end of history. (Hardt and Negri 2003, p. xiv)

Whereas places in modernity were in continual exchange with their outsides, the space of imperial sovereignty appears as a continuous, borderless, and uniform space. "In this smooth space of Empire, there is no *place* of power—it is both everywhere and nowhere. Empire is an *ou-topia*, or really a *non-place*." (ibid., p. 190, original emphasis) Space thus appears boundless and universal while time is rendered permanent and eternal. Because *Empire* has no spatial and temporal boundaries, governing the totality of time and space, it extends to the entirety of the social world. It governs not only human interactions but over very human nature and therefore describes a form of biopower. The non-place of *Empire* thus marks the shift from the industrial economy to the biopolitical management where industrial labour has been replaced with immaterial and intellectual labour.

Interestingly, "[w]hereas the previous, transitional perspectives focused attention on the legitimating dynamics that would lead toward the new order, in the new paradigm it is as if the new order were already constituted." (ibid., p. 14) *Empire* thus presents itself as an *actually existing utopia*. While, on the outside, *Empire* "is always dedicated to peace—a perpetual and universal peace outside of history" (ibid., p. xv), its practice "is continually bathed in blood" (ibid.). This then might be *Empire's*

biggest paradox. While presenting itself as an achieved utopia in which the existence of crisis is negated, crisis, however, is *omnipresent*. Crisis consequently becomes *internalised* and *naturalised* in the age of *Empire*.

It is therefore defined as *smooth* because boundaries and differences are set aside, welcoming everyone into the imperial space of consensus. Differences are set aside, not because they do not exist, but because of indifference and ignorance. They are imagined to be cultural instead of political and therefore non-conflictual. Built on the premises of universal acceptance and neutrality it "makes possible the establishment and legitimation of a universal notion of right that forms the core of the Empire." (ibid., p. 198) *Empire* is thus a machine for universal integration in which subjectivities glide without substantial resistance or conflict. This also marks a shift from the negation of differences to their affirmation since it prevents subjects from appearing as a unity. "Contingency, mobility, and flexibility are Empire's real power." (ibid., p. 201)

Thus, if *Empire* marks the totality of the social world, then *Junkspace* is its spatial setting. "Junkspace is the result of the unification or integration of the totality of the built spaces of modern metropolises. It is incessantly devouring the entirety of the spaces on the planet and combining all the existing spaces to produce an interior whose limits and edges are not perceivable." (Karbasioun 2018, p. 145) Not only do many similarities between *Junkspace* and *Empire* exist, conceptually as well as in vocabulary; Negri himself has argued that "Junkspace is biopolitical." (Negri 2009, p. 48) However, if biopolitical space is conceptualised as the all-encompassing space of *anti-utopianism*, how does a certain degree of utopianism, even if limited, survive in this equalising totality? How does bland, anonymous *Junkspace* relate to the spectacular architecture of *Degenerate Utopias*?

For one, whereas *Junkspace* represents the unmotivated by-product of capitalist globalisation, iconic *Degenerate Utopias* are the affirmative celebration of it. Whereas the latter is therefore still to some extent motivated to make a valuable contribution to society, be it only on a cultural level, the former is completely detached from any form of societal improvement and motivated by market needs alone. However, since both at the end of the day are heavily motivated by economic forces, it could

be argued that *Degenerate Utopias* control and fix time-space for as long as surplus value can be created, while *Junkspace* generates the infinite cash-cow, endlessly reproducing itself. For Zygmunt Bauman this means that such *Degenerate Utopias* have to create the impression of endless new beginnings. "Hence the attraction of a modicum of happiness known to be on offer in the already visited and familiar places needs to compete with the magnetic power of 'virgin lands' and 'new beginnings' […]. […] In the transgressive imagination of liquid modernity the 'place' (whether physical or social) has been replaced by the unending sequence of new beginnings" (Bauman 2003, pp. 23–24).

This creates a peculiar landscape of singular capitalist utopias existing *within* an endless anti-utopian space. It reveals two deciding aspects: that abstract systems of power still need very physical places to attract real human beings and that these will therefore continue to be informed by symbolism, culture, and meaning, and thus ultimately by some kind of utopianism. To paraphrase Castells, this is the most fundamental paradox existing in our globalised, urbanised, networked world: a world in which functionality, wealth, and power are created in abstract networks, human beings live and work in very physical places (Castells 2017). Furthermore, places and non-places are not strictly separatable as Augé observes. "In the concrete reality of today's world, places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together. The possibility of non-place is never absent from any place. Place becomes a refuge to the habitue of non-places" (Augé 1995, p. 107). Moreover, many of the spaces of the modern metropolis typically defined as *Junkspace* meanwhile have become the central projects for iconic architecture: railway stations, airports, hotels, convention centres, shopping malls. "[I]rregularity and uniqueness are constructed from identical elements." (Koolhaas 2002, p. 178) This creates contradictory combinations of seemingly exclusive opposites such as celebrated individuality versus equalising homogeneity, novelty versus sameness, etc. Nevertheless, both *problem-solving utopianism* and *anti-utopianism* ultimately produce time-spaces of control. While authority can act in a visibly controlled fixity, it can also act in contingent and imperceptible ways. Furthermore, both these forms of utopianism seem to produce

restrictive time-spaces of an ahistorical, presentist experience which lacks historical legitimacy, cultural heritage, and broader references to socio-political contexts. Both create the ideological and material manifestation of globalised neoliberalism in the early 21st century.

"But can one actually *live* in a presentist city?" (Hartog 2017, p. xix, original emphasis)

5.3 Techno-Utopias: Utopianism 'Solving' Crisis

So far, this book has shed light on how utopianism and crisis relate to architecture and how they are influenced by various other concepts, values and (outdated) myths. Amongst others, the idea of growth-oriented progress, scientism, solution-oriented thinking as well as deterministic understandings of time and space have been addressed as essential aspects in comprising the underlying assumptions in *problem-solving utopianisms*. In architectural projects this form of utopianism leads to the reduction of architecture to aesthetics, function, and form, which is presented as final and thus as a frozen snapshot in time. Architecture here is offered as the final solution to social as well as environmental problems and presents a pivotal tool for capital accumulation. While this reveals architecture's development as a power-induced, problem-solving discipline in general, in the context of multiple crises this way of problem-oriented thinking seems to come to a head in distinctly future-oriented projects, namely *Techno-Utopias*.

What largely separates *Techno-Utopias* from the previous two spatio-temporal formations is their relation to crisis: In *Degenerate Utopias* any reference to crisis is *avoided*, creating superficially harmonious crisis-free places. In *Junkspace* crisis is so *omnipresent* that it dissolves and becomes *naturalised* and *internalised*. *Techno-Utopias*, however, reflect architecture's *engagement* with crisis. They represent a direct architectural *response* to a specific crisis. Furthermore, *techno* here carries a double meaning. Similar to *Degenerate Utopias* and *Junkspace* technology and *technoaesthetics* are a significant feature. The second aspect, however, reflects the deep inclination to *technocracy*: In *Techno-Utopias,* multiple

crises are reduced and abstracted to a *singular* crisis, mostly the climate crisis, and viewed as a problem to be solved, best with technocratic bureaucracy and technology. To demonstrate their future-compatibility, such projects are accompanied by buzzwords such as *resilience, innovation, smart, sustainability*, or *the future*.

'Sustainable' and 'smart' projects catch a lot of attention today, "attention that extends far beyond their actual impact on the metabolism of cities" (Picon 2020, p. 279). In the case of *smart cities*, there exists a similar discrepancy between rhetoric and reality found in public spaces (Madanipour 2019): While claiming to serve public interests, smart city concepts are often part of a hidden neoliberal agenda. Giuseppe Grossi and Daniela Pianezzi (2017), for example, have analysed how smart city projects try to benefit from debates regarding democratic participation, emancipation, and ideas on civil society, while in reality being driven by entrepreneurial goals of businesses which are not democratically elected, planned top-down, and with a view of inhabitants as consumers. While they often rhetorically target urgent urban problems of contemporary urbanisation processes, "supply-driven smart city solutions […] are disconnected from their social context and fail to tackle a city's problems in a cohesive way" (citing Angelidou, ibid., p. 83). In addition, existing city rankings that measure the 'smartness' of cities and countries indicate that buzzwords can be of monetary value. "A 'smarter' country is worth up to 10 points in GDP annually." (Citing ABB, ibid., p. 81)

Smart city concepts are good examples of the broader culture of techno-managerialism resulting from neoliberal governance. Following neoliberal restructurings of the public sector, attention has shifted to competition, deregulation, and collaboration between government and stakeholders, resulting in private-public partnerships. This leads to contesting assumptions in addressing social change in the context of multiple crises. According to Ulrich Brand (2009, 2016b), the biggest discrepancy comes down to believing that meaningful change could occur within the current economic and political system. As Ruth Levitas has noted, "where change seems difficult, utopia is either impossible to imagine, or becomes collapsed into the analysis of the present it-

self" (Levitas 2013a, p.123). Managerial, *problem-solving utopianisms* are therefore restricted to known territory, tools, and institutions. This means that crisis gets 'managed' by authorities who decide on 'the exception', often benefitting private interests.[11] Technocratic fixes address phenomena only superficially, "to assure that the world as we know it stays fundamentally the same" (with reference to Žižek, Kaika and Swyngedouw 2014, p. 7).

A good example of such problem-solving techno-utopianism in architecture is Bjarke Ingels, who advocates for 'hedonistic sustainability' in which the building is supposed to resolve environmental issues in such a way that the current lifestyle of the inhabitant (or consumer?) can be sustained. In an interview he states that creating sustainable buildings means "to find ways of designing cities and buildings […] where the outcome doesn't actually force people to alter their lifestyle to have a better conscience. They can live exactly the way they want, or even better, because the world and the city are designed in such a way that they can actually do so. Essentially, it is to approach the question of sustainability not as a moral dilemma but as a *design challenge*" (Jordan 2018, own emphasis).

Lifestyle indeed seems to be a crucial aspect in *Techno-Utopias*, which is indebted to the fact that socio-environmental responsibilities have become heavily individualised as a means of distraction from big players and systemic change. Today, even bringing a child into the world is debated as a sustainable decision and its renunciation "[t]he greatest impact individuals can have in fighting climate change" (with reference to a study, Carrington 2017). However, "[w]hen it comes to polarizing rhetoric, there is no greater opportunity to divide people than when it comes to lifestyle choices, for they are tied directly to one's sense of identity." (Mann 2021, p. 72) So too for architecture, which plays an increasingly important role in the creation of sustainable identities. In contradiction to the alleged rationale of pure pragmatism, this hence reveals once more the extent to which symbolism in architecture is of (inherent) significance. Beyond merely representing 'sustainable'

11 See *3.2 The Crisis Narrative*.

projects, say as a means for saving energy, it is as if "architecture was particularly apt to convey essential aspects of the urban future." (Picon 2020, p. 279)

Hence nature 'as thing to be saved' becomes a reoccurring element in future-oriented projects, often simply by placing vegetable elements in "highly visible and improbable positions, like trophies meant to celebrate the victory of sustainability upon industrial philistinism." (Picon 2013b, p. 146) Trees and plants acquire strong symbolic meaning as a way to reconcile architecture with nature "as if to make, through representation, a built world compatible with the natural one." (Levit 2008, p. 81) Making architecture 'natural' can therefore be seen as an attempt of disguising or superficially reversing the divisions between exploiting society as opposed to nature. As Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw have indicated, there is however nothing 'natural' even in nature, since nature is always constructed, "imagined, scripted and symbolically charged" (Kaika and Swyngedouw 2014, p. 6). As any space or human-made concept, nature has no fixed meaning and exists in human minds beyond its actual materiality. "This means, quite simply, that there is no *foundational Nature* out there that needs or requires salvation in name of either Nature itself or a generic Humanity. There is nothing foundational in *Nature* that needs, demands, or requires sustaining." (ibid., original emphasis)

The salvific aspect in apocalyptically painted futures hence quite vividly portrays the survival of the ancient-old demiurgic instinct to save the world through architectural projects. In particularly dystopian visions the primary task of architecture has become harbouring what is left, saving what can be saved, and to create the final habitat for everything living in a world otherwise destroyed.[12] While such visions are abundant in paper architecture, this way of thinking is representative of a broader culture which emphasises architecture as an ideal object and as a product of the mind.[13] While *Techno-Utopias*, built or on paper, may

12 A good example of this would be *Lilypad*, a floating ecopolis for climate refugees by Vincent Callebaut Architectures (https://www.vincent.callebaut.org/object/080523_lilypad/lilypad/projects, checked on 16/01/2022).

13 See *6.2 Rethinking Architectural Education*, p. 130.

offer striking designs, their visionary aspect is debatable since these projects work within the *existing* social framework, which is simply being extrapolated into a (determined) future. They envision a future under the circumstances 'if present trends continue' instead of offering ideas to prevent these trends from happening in the first place. Ironically, "instead of being a project for the future, utopia becomes a critical reflection *on the present*, losing in this way its projective character" (Jeinić 2013, p. 72, own emphasis). *Techno-Utopias* thus lack critical assessments of underlying systemic issues and do not tackle the multiple crises at their roots. They are created by an elite, for and elite, offering consumption-oriented habitats for people that can afford to live in them.[14] Built on a scarcity mentality couched in the jargon of 'sustainability' they ensure, as mentioned, that in fact nothing has to change to tackle the crisis – all that is needed is the *right design*. This reveals the extent to which "architectural green utopianism of spatial form appears as the summit of an authoritarian management of socioecological systems needed to provide conditions for intact accumulation of capital in the era of ecological crisis." (ibid., p. 71)

Furthermore, the varying futures painted out in *Techno-Utopias* reveal once more how thoroughly contested the concept of the future is. While in some visions apocalyptic futures are used to promote personal interests, in others they spread fear to "cancel out as absurd transformative utopian thinking" (Levitas 2013a, p. 123). In this sense, "[f]atalism is not just dystopian, tending to gloomy prognoses for the future, but anti-utopian" (ibid.). In other cases again, dystopian narratives are the result of narrow-minded, stereotypical and deterministic thinking, a trend that has been defined as *noir urban scholarship*, foreclosing the differentiating dynamics and contingent nature of urban spaces (Pow 2015). Other projects in contrast are embedded in optimistic and celebratory rhetoric to promote their realisability (Grossi and Pianezzi 2017). In this sense, there exists a high correlation between urban narratives and the hidden agendas in power-driven processes. With regards to future

14 Ironically, the aforementioned project *Lilypad* is placed in front of the coast of Monaco.

narratives, Ulrich Brand describes this process as *futuring*, in which resource-driven narratives become objects "of *current* (non-)decision and (non-)action" (Brand 2016a, p. 518, original emphasis). As a result, both *futuring* and the extrapolation of the present into the future reveal once more how much even ideas on the future have become heavily marked by presentism.

Regarding the colonisation of imaginative thought, it has to be stressed that projects existing on paper share and interact with the same imaginary of which built architecture emerges from. It would therefore be a mistake to argue that hypothetical projects would have no influence on the 'real' world. In fact, the competition culture in architecture, from which a lot of paper architecture emerges, fosters the reduction of architecture to representation. As "the search for excellence in architecture" (citing Chupin et al., Till 2018, p. 161) competitions not only cultivate the separation of architecture and social processes but celebrate this form of architecture as prestige projects. For these reasons, it is often argued that "competition projects *function like utopias*." (Citing Chupin et al., ibid., p. 161, original emphasis) Once again, "[i]t may thus be said of architectural discourse that […] it suffers from the delusion that 'objective' knowledge of 'reality' can be attained by means of graphic representations." (Lefebvre 1997 [1974], p. 361) In light of increasing mediatisation and individualisation, knowledge society however increasingly relies on representation as a mediation of cultural codes. In a world in which imagination is restricted to images and presentism, it has thus become far easier to imagine what the future might *look* like, rather than what the future might *feel* like.

Furthermore, since *techno-utopianism* meanders between cultural and nihilistic codes, between *utopianism* and *anti-utopianism*, it sheds light on how such seemingly opposing concepts are not mutually exclusive dualisms, but that projects can paradoxically fluctuate in-between. This also means that projects can simultaneously contain elements that make out *Techno-Utopias* and *Degenerate Utopias*, for example. Similarly fluid is the idea of *Junkspace*, which according to Koolhaas, Hardt and Negri, anyway seems to be surrounding us 'everywhere'.

Finally, it is important to stress that this book does not wish to portray technology as inherently evil or to go culturally back in time. Today's society does not exist without technology. It is nevertheless only as 'good' or 'bad' as the humans who employ it. Its use and embeddedness in culture therefore needs more scrutiny and deeper analysis, which eventually should inform decision-making processes as well as (architectural) education. Thus, while technological innovations are praised for accelerating and improving society, it should be critically assessed if ever-increasing linear forward movement is the right approach at all, and so on. Furthermore, while ideas such as energy-saving buildings are helpful parts in the puzzle for addressing environmental change, their contribution is small in the context of multiple crises. Such 'solutions' downplay the need for changes in lifestyle as well as socio-political frameworks, not only due to a growth- and resource-finite planet, but also due to the increasing socio-political and economic injustices. In this sense, the climate crisis is not the only crisis which needs to be tackled. Superficial attempts at 'solving' crisis therefore disregard the inherent contradictions of globalised neoliberalism induced by patriarchal, imperial, and neocolonial structures.

"We need to understand that the solution to global warming is not to fix the world. We need to understand that we need to fix ourselves."[15] Talking about a vision for society is more than envisioning futuristic buildings. Thinking seriously about how we as living beings want to further thrive together on this planet is a complex and ambitious task. No utopia will ever be able, or ought, to be seen as the answer to this question. Too often utopia has been understood as the remedy to society's problems. In fact, too often planners have believed that the remedy to society's problems could be planned at all. No project of any kind – may it be of political or spatial nature, can, or should, ever be seen as 'the solution' to human needs. If it is not the answer we ought to look for, what are the questions we ought to pose then?

15 This message appeared in the documentary film Carbon and Captivity by Oliver Ressler, 2020.