

ARCHITECTURE IN FICTION

ESTRANGEMENT, NATURALISATION AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONTEMPORARY SPECULATIVE FICTION FILMS

This dissertation is concerned with the deterioration of architectural 'language' in the everyday architecture of the present. Like all cultural phenomena, 'communication' forms one of the central functions of architecture. Much of the non-contextual contemporary landscapes neglect the 'art' in architecture and lack the ability to communicate meaningful narratives or signify its complex contextual conditions. The quality of storytelling, that was inherent in historic architecture, is something that contemporary architecture could strive to enhance. For this purpose, this research seeks inspiration in another form of storytelling: speculative fiction.

The thesis can be seen as positing two basic arguments:

- 1) Proposing that the virtual media architectures in fiction films stand as valid exercises in architectural design, and are worthy of serious and critical investigation in architectural studies.
- 2) The essential nature of fictional narratives is to communicate the stories and persuade its audience. Thus, the architecture of fiction films possesses effective strategies of communication, which could inspire present architectural practice.



“POSITING A UTOPIAN HORIZON DOES NOT LEAD TO IGNORING WHAT IS IN FRONT OF US; RATHER IT DEMANDS A CONSTANT ATTENDANCE TO THE PRESENT MOMENT AND GIVES THE ABILITY TO SEE IT MORE CLEARLY.”¹

The architectures studied here are from some of the most popular speculative fiction films of the past two decades. That are paving the path for a changed course of architectural imaginations. Also, the meaningful social commentary through fiction opens avenues for critical thinking and imagination. In that regard, the agency of fiction in changing our perspectives towards reality is discussed briefly. The main case study in this research is the Marvel superhero film 'Black Panther' (2018), and to some extent 'Thor: Ragnarok' (2017).

The concepts of 'estrangement' and 'naturalization' serve as the framework for the discussion of the architectures in the films. Thus, themes of modern nostalgia, alienation and familiarization in their architectures is discussed. The utopian and dystopian imaginations in fiction as sources of caution as well as hope.

The Lacanian notion, that fantasy is ultimately rooted in 'lack', is also explored to further gain insight into issues of architectural alienation in present day societies. The studies help throw light upon the absence of a mutually shared language between people and architecture and a loss of sense of belongingness. In these architectures, allusions to the socio-cultural, historical, traditional archetypes and reflections of individual and communal identities provide grounds for association for the people. This bridge of a shared language can improve communication through architecture, and enable it to tell stories to and of the people.



1. Alun Rhys Williams, 'Recognizing Cognition: On Suvin, Miéville, and the Utopian Impulse in the Contemporary Fantastic, Science Fiction Studies (41)(3), (2014): 628.



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