

Utopia. Between Future and Apocalypse

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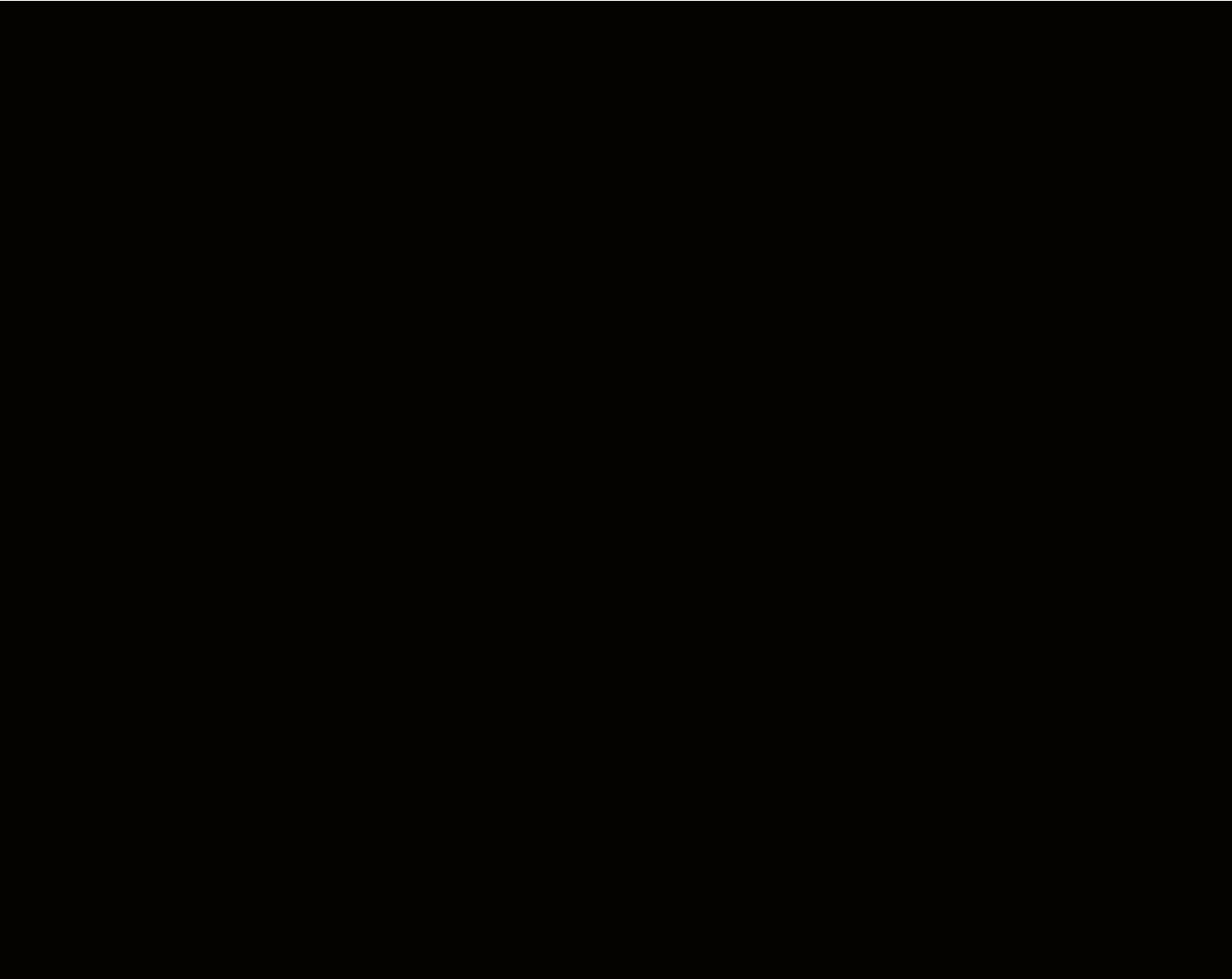
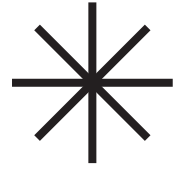
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PhD in Architecture.
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UTOPIA. BETWEEN FUTURE AND APOCALYPSE



Valentina Labriola

Cycle
38° - PoliTo Grant / Joint PhD Tsinghua

Year
2022 - 2025

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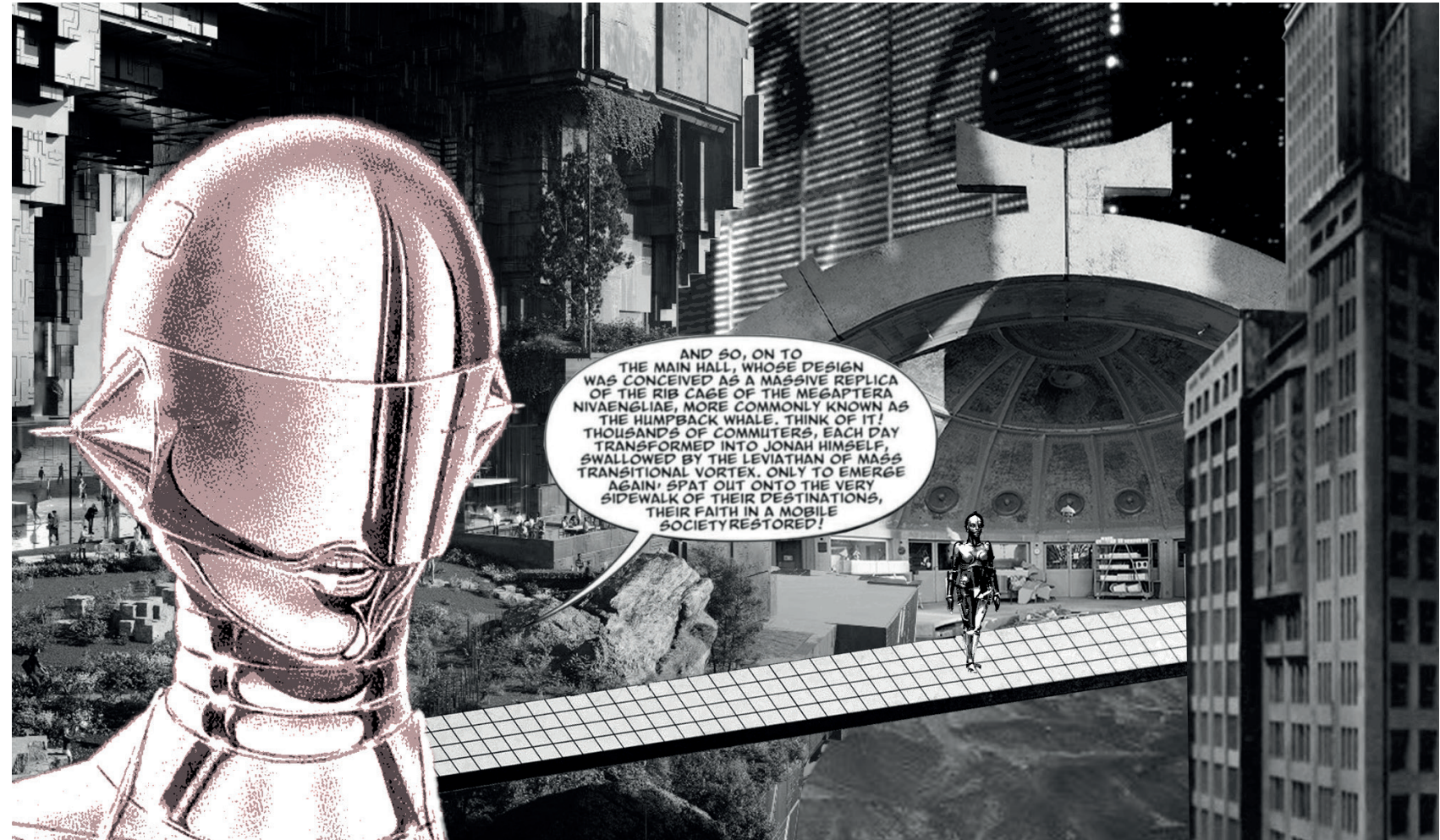
Research Group
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What will be the form of the future is a mantra that has driven the design production of most architects over the centuries. The eternal quest for the perfect city, an unattainable utopia that has taken on ever-new forms and connotations, still obsesses architects today. Utopias refer to the aspirations and visions of individuals or groups who seek to bring about a transformative change in society by challenging the present reality. Throughout history, architects have been crucial in promoting and interpreting those various movements by designing unreal spaces. Although the designs may have evolved through time, the architects' mission is still to cultivate a dialogue between idealised concepts and architectural designs in their diverse expressions. From the pure and peaceful representation of the 'Città ideale' (Unknown, 1480-1490) to the disruptive image of a new society in the project of 'The Line' (Vv.Aa., 2021), the aim has always been to form a nonexistent space that challenges the current norms.

The revolutionary ideas that design brings about are closely connected to the historical contexts in which they came out. New cities are the architects' way of addressing the problems of the time, or a drastic representation of ideals or values. One specific way in which spatial design has served utopia is by imagining the space for a new society, which marked particular moments in the history of the XX century, such as the centralised Soviet experience (De Magistris & Scotti, 2018) or intentional communities, among which Arcosanti is one of the most known examples (Dunn & Cureton, 2020). Architecture, as well as literature and cinema, shares an aesthetic in-

terest in imagining alternatives to the human condition (Butt, 2018). However, although it is the architects' mission to imagine and design a better future, dystopian outcomes of technological dreams or social engineering have been frequently shaped by science fiction, whose visualisation reflects on the human ways of life and their spaces. In science fiction, human behaviour and the consequences of human actions are frequently explored. For example, the short story 'Billennium' by Ballard (Ballard, 1962) showcases a future where overpopulation forces people to reside in cramped cubicles. This scenario resembles present-day living conditions in densely populated urban areas, like the famous Mong Kok district in Hong Kong or the North East district in New Delhi. Topics such as extreme living conditions and human isolation are commonly found in the current science fiction literature, where the authors stress how their writing is a

Vv.Aa. (Announced in 2021, probably construction in 2030). *The Line, Neom* (Saudi Arabia) - <https://www.neom.com/en-us/regions/theline>.
Ballard J.G. (1962). *Billennium*. In: Ballard J.G. (1962), *Billennium*. New York City: Berkley Publishing Corporation, pp.7-25.
Butt A. (2018). Endless Forms, Vistas and Hues: Why Architects Should Read Science Fiction, in *Architectural Research Quarterly* 22, n. 2.
Cureton P., Dunn N. (2014). *Future of cities: a visual history of the future*.
De Magistris A., Scotti A. (Eds.). (2014), *Utopiae finis? Percorsi tra utopismi e progetto*. Torino: Accademia University Press.
Hao J. (2016), *Folding Beijing*. In: Liu K. (Ed.), *Invisible Planets*. New York: Tor Books, pp.183-222.
Unknown (formerly attributed to Luciano Laurana). (1480-1490). *Città ideale*. [Oil on board]. Galleria Nazionale delle Marche. Urbino. - <http://www.gallerianazionalemarche.it/collezioni-gnm/citta-ideale/>.



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way of discussing contemporary issues. For instance, the renowned Chinese writer Hao Jingfang explains that her work as a professional economist, conducting surveys in tech factories throughout China, affected her short story 'Folding Beijing' (Hao, 2016), and many of her other writings. People's working conditions, and their worries about technology, inspired her works on a futuristic China that is very close to the contemporary. In this context, the research aims to understand how 'projects' of the future could embrace technological innovations and their interlocking impacts on social life within a single grand narrative. Throughout a study of contempo-

rary architecture utopias and an analysis of how ecology discourses filtered in these urban images, the thesis will investigate different models of the cities of the future to define today's trends, and how they have changed. The definition of those dreams and nightmares will start from the design features promoted by architectural magazines (whether intended as actual pre-figuration of the future, or not) and from an overview of science-fiction production to prefigure some key elements which will guide the analysis. The definition of international case studies and field research will eventually set the scene for present-day architecture and things yet to come.

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COLOPHON

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“The PhD Program in Architecture. History and Project (DASP) was born out of two long lasting traditions of doctoral level studies and research in the area of Architecture at Politecnico di Torino. The PhD Program programmatically investigates the complexity of architectural cultures starting from the multi-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary interweaving between the history and the design of buildings, cities, territories.

On the one hand, in fact, urban and architectural composition and technology of architecture favor an interpretation of the project as a tool for measuring the stratifications of theoretical elaborations, technical

innovations and modifications of built environment.

On the other hand, the historical disciplines for architecture and the city, far from a local vision and thanks to the cooperation with other histories (the economic, social, anthropological and aesthetic ones), trace paths that can be traveled by architects and urban planners, but also by other humanities scholars, such as philosophers and linguists”

Marco Trisciuglio

(from the document Proposal for the accreditation of doctorates - a.y. 2023/2024, presented to the Italian Ministry of University and Research on June 5th, 2023)

