

## Introduction

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### Imaging the Modern City, Darkly

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As the world becomes increasingly urban, dire predictions of an impending crisis have reached a feverish pitch. Alarming statistics on the huge and unsustainable gap between the rates of urbanization and economic growth in the global South is seen to spell disaster. The unprecedented agglomeration of the poor produces the specter of an unremittingly bleak “planet of slums.”<sup>1</sup> Monstrous megacities do not promise the pleasures of urbanity but the misery and strife of the Hobbesian jungle. The medieval maxim that the city air makes you free appears quaint in view of the visions of an approaching urban anarchy. Urbanists write about fortified “privatopias” erected by the privileged to wall themselves off from the imagined resentment and violence of the multitude. Instead of freedom, the unprecedented urbanization of poverty seems to promise only division and conflict. The image of the modern city as a distinct and bounded entity lies shattered as market-led globalization and media saturation dissolve boundaries between town and countryside, center and periphery.<sup>2</sup> From the ruins of the old ideal of the city as a space of urban citizens there emerges, sphinx-like, a “Generic City” of urban consumers.<sup>3</sup>

As important as it is to assess the substance of these readings of contemporary trends in urbanization, it is equally necessary to examine their dark form as a mode of urban representation. This form is not new. Since the turn of the twentieth century, dystopic images have figured prominently in literary, cinematic, and sociological representations of the modern city. In these portrayals, the city often appears as dark, insurgent (or forced into total obedience), dysfunctional (or forced into machine-like functioning), engulfed in ecological and social crises, seduced by capitalist consumption, paralyzed by crime, wars, class, gender, and racial conflicts, and subjected to excessive technological and technocratic control. What characterizes such representations is not just their bleak mood but also their mode of interpretation, which ratchets up a critical reading of specific historical conditions to diagnose crisis and catastrophe.

This volume returns to the history of dark representations of the city in order to explore them as forms of urban criticism. There exists, of course, a sophisticated body of scholarship on the dystopic imagination as a distinct literary form. Unlike utopian texts, which transport us to an imaginary future that indicts the present, the dystopic imagination places us directly in a terrifying world to alert us of the danger that the future holds if we do not recognize its symptoms in the present.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, a utopian desire animates dystopic texts. While recognizing the critical potential of the dystopic imagination, this volume examines it as a form of urban representation; the modern city, after all, appears to be an instantiation of a dystopic form of society.

The approach is global because such is the history of modernity. For this reason, we do not limit our consideration to the classic image of urban dystopia, which emerged as a specific literary and cinematic construct in the West. Nor do we offer a taxonomical classification of urban dystopia, for that would confer a global status to a provincial cultural and historical phenomenon. Thus, while analyzing urban dystopia as a particular form, the collection treats the term metaphorically to expand the historical and geographical range of dark criticisms of the city. Moving from Germany to Mexico to Japan to India to South Africa and China, the contributors read urban representations historically and explore their strengths and limits as critiques.

The essays are united by their focus on representations of the city and move from considering the images of the city to the imagined city, from urban imaginations to urban imaginaries. This is not because they are unaware of the specific intellectual histories associated with these terms; rather, it is because they recognize that modernity is inseparable from image production and circulation. Photography, cinema, print, and advertising have trained our senses to experience modern life through images. Even if we do not always realize it, visibility is integral to our knowledge and practice. It is thus that the image of the city imperceptibly becomes the imagined space in which we live. Visibility saturates the symbols, values, and desires that make up urban society as an imaginary institution.

The title of the volume registers cinema's prominent role in inserting visibility in the experience of modern life. Of course, film noir is a specific form. But because of the wide circulation of its classic uses of light and dark spaces, the term "noir" has acquired a wider and a more varied meaning. While film scholars use the term to identify specific cinematic techniques, the practitioners in other disciplines deploy it metaphorically to refer to a grim, dystopic reality. Keeping in mind the specific genealogy of noir, the volume also places it in a broader interdisciplinary register. This is in line with our approach to both recognize the pivotal role of the production and circulation of media representations in modernity and to scrutinize the historical reach

and meanings of their dark, visual significations. The contributors ask: What pictures of urban society do these representations bring into view? What do they express and conceal? How were these images produced and circulated, and what were their meanings?

### **Modernism and Urban Dystopia**

Modernism was a uniquely metropolitan phenomenon. Emerging from the tumultuous changes of the twentieth century, modernism represented the high-culture expressions of the city. As writers, poets, artists, architects, and filmmakers breathed the air of rapidly changing and growing cities, they were exhilarated by the new urban experience. For poets and novelists, the street appeared as the magical stage for the enactment of modern life. They found the chaotic energy of the traffic and the maelstrom of the crowd awe-inspiring. Writers and filmmakers alike were fascinated by the clockwork-like rhythm of daily life as thousands of workers and office-goers entered and exited their workspaces at regular hours. As technology reshaped the cityscape, the spirit of architects and designers soared. Harnessing the awesome power of science and technology, they planned utopias of perfectly designed and synchronized housing, streets, traffic, and artifacts of daily life.

But a shadow always hung over the modernist halo. Inequity and oppression punctuated the drama of freedom on the street. The experience of immersion in the crowd produced feelings of estrangement and atomization, and the gathering of the multitude could easily become part of the spectacle of mass society that capitalism staged. The rhythm of daily urban life might suggest a symphony, but it also spelled the boredom of routinization. The awesome promise of technology and planned futures was also terrifying. One way in which modernism expressed this terror was through the image of urban dystopia. Its dark visions of mass society forged by capitalism and technology, however, did not necessarily mean a forthright rejection of the modern metropolis but a critique of the betrayal of its utopian promise. The dystopic form functioned as a critical discourse that embraced urban modernity rather than reject it.

Eric Weitz writes: "Weimar was Berlin, Berlin Weimar."<sup>5</sup> The experience of urban modernity was global, but it was in Weimar Germany where it was felt with particular intensity. Appropriately, then, Anton Kaes opens the section on the urban dystopias of modernism with an examination of Fritz Lang's 1927 film *Metropolis*. Lang's film has been the subject of much scholarly study, and its apocalyptic images of bleakness and destruction have never ceased to inspire science fiction and dystopic films. Kaes returns to the film to read in

it the biblical imagery of the destruction of the Tower of Babel in the Book of Genesis and the extinction of the city of Babylon in the Book of Revelation. He argues that the biblical reference served to suggest that only the apocalyptic destruction of the dystopic city held the promise of a new beginning. This dystopia was the Machine City, the utopia of technology ratcheted up several notches to extinguish human agency altogether. Lang achieves this representation by ingeniously bringing together the city, the machine, and the technological apparatus of cinema. His dystopic city is a purely cinematic creation, accomplished with dissolves, fades, high camera angles, sharp cuts, and shots of moving pistons, streaks of light, and mechanical parts superimposed over the image of the cityscape.

Embodying the power of technology that it critiques, *Metropolis* is caught between being enthralled and frightened by the machinic big city. Thus, Kaes points out, the last image of the destruction of the largest building, called the “New Tower of Babel” in *Metropolis*, ends by repeating the inscription from the beginning of the scene: “Great is the world and its Creator! And great is Man!” When the film ends with the apocalyptic destruction of the city and the start of a new future, we have been warned of what modernity could become. But the biblical imagery of the apocalypse locates the source of destruction not in human actions or historical forces but in the malfunction of the machine. The dystopic form does not completely reject technology, only its excessive and dehumanizing development into the Machine City.

James Donald points to another impulse in modernism’s dystopic moment by examining its encounter with the sounds of the city and its machines in early twentieth-century Europe. Reading the modernist writers’ responses to the “hell of modern urban noise,” he finds the utopian-dystopian binarism too constricting. The dystopic strain in their response to the noise of factory sirens and electric streetcars did not signify an opposition to utopia but an acknowledgment of the impossibility of perfection. With such an approach, Donald interprets the dystopic elements in modernist writings on urban noise as attempts to train the senses to the new experiences of the modern city. This training was a process of translation that sought solutions posed by unfamiliar sounds. It involved gaining a sociological and aesthetic understanding of emerging sounds of the Machine Age. It entailed coming to grips with the new sensory experience of hearing the working of machines, the babel of immigrant tongues in the city, the hiss of the radio, the mechanically reproduced sound of the gramophone, and jazz. In the modernists’ dystopian response to the shock and stimuli of the modern city, Donald hears a note of “affective diagnosis,” a lesson in coming to terms with what Emily Thompson calls the “soundscape of modernity.”<sup>6</sup>

With Rubén Gallo's essay, we turn to modernism's international career in Mexico. Modernist cultural production through cameras, typewriters, radios, and print had made its appearance in Mexico after the armed conflicts of the early twentieth century. A utopian desire to transform society through technology took hold of Mexican artists.<sup>7</sup> They believed that technological modernism would propel the country into the future, shaking off the burden of its premodern past. Gallo writes about the debris of Mexican urban architectural utopia as it collapses into a dystopia in the 1960s. The dystopia he examines is not the one that the modernists imagined but the ruins of their utopian plans in Mexico City.

Gallo begins with Rem Koolhaas's typically provocative proposal for Paris: raze ("liberate") an entire district of the city and make it available to an urban planner willing to conceive projects for the emptied space. What Paris promptly rejected, Mexico City had already experienced. Through its history, large parts of the city had been regularly razed and turned into a tabula rasa available for new architecture. Gallo focuses on the case of the modernist housing complex of Tlatelolco in Mexico City. The architect was Mario Pani, who had been trained in Paris, where Le Corbusier's idea of *la ville radieuse* made a deep impression on him. On his return to Mexico City, he won several government projects for working-class housing in which he implemented Le Corbusier's ideas. The biggest project was the Tlatelolco housing complex, consisting of fifteen thousand apartments, contained in several superblocks and spread over several thousand meters of a decaying neighborhood. Two years after its completion in 1966, it became the site of a tragic massacre of students who had gathered to protest undemocratic rule. In 1985, a powerful earthquake leveled many of the buildings. Gallo argues that the ruins of Tlatelolco serve as the memory of utopian dreams returning as dystopic nightmares. The megalomania of modernist architecture is revealed as the site of political oppression and disaster. Like the urban dystopia in *Metropolis*, the relics of modernist architecture in Mexico City point to the utopian promise gone out of control.

What emerges clearly from these three accounts of the experiences with technological urban modernity is that dystopic representations afforded varying critiques. The crucial variable seems to have been the room that they left open for human intervention. *Metropolis*, produced with the technological apparatus of cinema, offered a critique of the Machine City while retaining a utopian belief in technology and leaving no room for human agency. If the modernist writers, about whom Donald writes, responded to the "hellish noise" of the modern city by coming to terms with it, by training their senses, this was because they did not confer autonomous power to the machine; they

placed themselves in the dystopic soundscape and learned to make a place for the sound of the machine in their sensory experience. Gallo, too, demonstrates that it was the tragic massacre of protesting students that brought the technological utopia of Tlatelolco down to earth. When the earthquake turned it into rubble, people saw in the natural catastrophe a just end to the authoritarian fantasies of architectural modernism. Fittingly, it is in Mexico City that we see the dystopic debris of technological modernism that once expressed Europe's global hegemony.

### The Aesthetics of the Dark City

Writing about cinema, Walter Benjamin stated: "Our bars and city streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories seemed to close relentlessly around us. Then came film and exploded this prison-world with the dynamite of the split-second, so that now we can set off calmly on journeys of adventure among its far-flung debris."<sup>8</sup> He pointed out that with such techniques as close-ups, enlargement, slow motion, and editing, cinema rearranged the cityscape and brought to light "entirely new structures of matter" and "unknown aspects within them."<sup>9</sup> This recomposed representation of the urban experience by film was related to cultural transformations in perception in the modern city, "changes that are experienced on the scale of private existence by each passerby in big-city traffic."<sup>10</sup> In this sense, cinema, according to Benjamin, was not restricted to images on-screen in the darkened theater but formed part of the larger apparatus of perception in the modern city.<sup>11</sup>

As films like Walter Ruttmann's *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) deployed this perceptual apparatus, they also gave expression to a sense of the urban uncanny,<sup>12</sup> a feeling that the urban order of reason, transparency, and technology contained within it the seeds of discontinuity, instability, disorder, and chaos. *Metropolis* expressed this uncanny in a dystopic form. Since then, different narrative and aesthetic genres of films, such as sci-fi and film noir, have developed to offer dark representations of urban space. The essays in this section analyze the cinema of darkness as the "archive of the city," to use Ranjani Mazumdar's evocative term.<sup>13</sup> How do we locate these films? What are the social imaginaries contained in their aesthetics of darkness?

Mark Shiel opens this section with an essay on the geographical underpinnings of film noir, the Hollywood crime dramas of the 1940s and 1950s. Using a black-and-white visual style inspired by German expressionism, noir offered a distinct aesthetic representation of changing postwar American cit-

ies. With its signature use of lighting to not only define space but also inflect it with psychological character and motivations, film noir projected a mood of urban anxiety and nihilism. It represented the city with images of deserted streets, crumbling neighborhoods, shadowy spaces and glittering skylines, petty criminals, elliptically speaking hard-boiled detectives, and characters with ambiguous sexual and moral motivations.

Historians and film studies scholars suggest that the noir style expressed the unsettling experience of postwar capitalist restructuring of urban life. The old city appeared irretrievably changed with the growing presence of African Americans. Feeling besieged, the whites fled to the suburbs, intensifying the dispersal of the population. Capitalist modernization and the rise of big corporations rendered social relations more opaque. Emerging in this context, film noir expressed nostalgia for the vanishing city and fear of the emergent urban forms.<sup>14</sup> Shiel accepts this interpretation but wishes to read the genre as more than a representation of generic American urban modernity. Rather than treat film noir as the expression of an iconic urban darkness, Shiel reads it in relation to its specific geography. Analyzing films produced in the decade from 1940 to 1950, he concludes that the number of films set in small towns and in the Midwest and the Northeast declined, whereas the proportion set in big cities and in the Southwest and California increased. More specifically, New York gave way to Los Angeles. A rightward drift in politics and anti-union actions by the Hollywood studio moguls, Shiel argues, enabled the emergence of the LA noir: there was a “real dystopian analogue” to the dystopia of the reel. The “the hidden meaning” of the dark city on-screen was the offscreen noir picture of the rightward capitalist restructuring of American urban life, Los Angeles, and Hollywood.

With William Tsutsui’s essay, we turn from the dystopic city of postwar film noir to the fictional destruction of Tokyo in Japanese films, television series, and animation after World War II. The attention turns from the low-key, black-and-white visual style to the aesthetics of horror and science fiction. Like film noir, however, Japanese doom culture does not refer to an actual city but offers iconic sci-fi representations of an urban dystopia. We see Tokyo destroyed again and again on-screen by giant tidal waves, fires, floods, volcanoes, alien invasions, giant monsters, robots, toxic pollution, and nuclear explosion. Of course, destruction is not alien to Tokyo’s history. During its five-and-a-half centuries of existence, fires, firebombing, and earthquakes have repeatedly destroyed the city.

Scholars and writers have interpreted Japan’s doom culture in relation to the experience of the atomic annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that looms large in Japanese memory. The prime example, of course, is *Godzilla*, the 164-foot radioactive monster reptile that rises from the Tokyo bay to

destroy the city in the 1954 Japanese film *Gojira*. But Godzilla was not all. Tsutsui points to the appearance of several other monsters on cinema and television screens, wreaking havoc on the city. The fear of a nuclear cataclysm is plain to see in these fantasies of urban annihilation. While acknowledging the gloomy influences of these memories and fears, Tsutsui argues that a note of millenarian hope and optimism pervades doom culture. Rather than relentless pessimism and nihilism, the depictions of urban ruins and mushroom clouds rising over Tokyo contain within them the pop millenarianism of Japan's postwar sci-fi dreamers. By expressing nostalgia for Japan's wartime destruction, these visions of doom broke taboos and fantasized about a new future. Thus, much like *Metropolis*, a new beginning follows destruction in several monster films. The city spontaneously regenerates after destruction, ready for the movie cameras to roll again and the next monster to once again go on a rampage. In the end, then, the sci-fi aesthetic offers a certain critical mood, a utopian desire that animates images of urban annihilation.

We turn from sci-fi images of urban dystopia to neorealism in Li Zhang's essay on the aesthetics of cinematic representation of postsocialist urban transition in China. She argues that the classic forms of dystopic representations familiar to the West—noir and sci-fi—are rarely invoked in China. Because of the Maoist state's control over culture and media, Western forms of dystopic images were never widely circulated. Thus, when the Sixth-Generation Chinese filmmakers emerged in the 1990s, they developed as an independent cinema movement and fashioned a distinct critical form. The Sixth-Generation has been called an urban generation because it has focused on the urban experience. While drawing on the noir style, this cinema mounts its criticism of China's urban transition under market economy by pulling the lives and struggles of the "insignificant" people into the frame. While films of the New Documentary movement present bleak and melancholic images of urban dislocation, dispossession, and abandonment, a fictional film like *Suzhou River* presents Shanghai as a gloomy and decaying industrial wasteland.

With an anthropologist's feel for changing urban conditions, Zhang shows how the melancholia of the independent cinema expresses the experience of loss and disorientation. The city of these films marks a distance from both the socialist utopia of the Maoist era and the glittering images of wealth and economic success in postsocialist China. Zhang calls the critical force of the Sixth-Generation cinema "post-ideological." By this she does not mean that it is beyond ideology but that it advocates neither socialism nor capitalism. Yet, developing in the shadow of socialism, this cinema expresses the predicaments of the postsocialist world. The filmmakers adopt the point of view of urban migrants and the "insignificant" people to represent a critique of China's plunge into market utopia.



Ranjani Mazumdar closes this section with an essay on what she calls the Urban Fringe of Bombay cinema. As the largest film industry in the world, Bombay cinema has been known for its melodrama. Mazumdar focuses on three recent films that consciously break from the prevalent form to paint a landscape of urban dystopia. She argues that at the core of these films lies the city of Mumbai as it copes with urban violence while undergoing tumultuous transformation under market-driven globalization. During the 1950s, Hindi cinema's crime melodramas often drew on film noir to represent the urban experience of inequality, dislocation, and disillusionment. In her earlier work, Mazumdar analyzed the figure of the urban vigilante in the Hindi cinema of the 1970s and described the images of the "panoramic interior" and the "gangster city" with which filmmakers grappled with the city under globalization.<sup>15</sup> She identifies the Urban Fringe as a "non-genealogical" form that emerges at the beginning of this century in the wake of a series of contemporary transformations linked to globalization.

Nishikant Kamat's *Dombivli Fast*, Homi Adjanian's *Being Cyrus*, and Anurag Kashyap's *No Smoking*, says Mazumdar, are films that have emerged on the periphery of the dominant film industry. These films are experimental, innovative, and driven by certain tendencies in international cinema. With an analysis of the formal codes deployed by these films, Mazumdar shows how the Urban Fringe offers images of friction, collision, and the grotesque to paint a dystopic imagination unavailable through the vision of Bombay's popular melodramas. Thus, *Dombivli Fast* offers us the violence that simmers under the machine-like daily life in the city. *Being Cyrus* turns the urban interior inside out, showing a grotesque private world as a mirror of the publicly visible city. In Kashyap's Kafkaesque *No Smoking*, the city appears as an instantiation of an oppressive order of surveillance, rationality, and governmentality. For Mazumdar, the crisis of the human emerges as the overall thematic arc in the three films. This theme turns the cinematic city of Mumbai into a twisted, nightmarish landscape where the human struggles for survival.

The essays in this section extend the meaning of urban dystopia to include in it other depictions of darkness. This underscores the historical specificity and meaning of cinematic conventions as forms of urban representations. Thus, Shiel resists reading film noir as the expression of a generic American urban bleakness and identifies the offscreen rightward restructuring of capitalism and the studio system in the rise of LA noir. Tsutsui's counterintuitive interpretation that postwar Japanese doom culture articulates the utopian desire of sci-fi dreamers reminds us of the particular historical meanings of *Godzilla* and other monster films in Japan. Zhang notes the remoteness of the classic conventions of urban dystopia in Chinese films about the contemporary experience of the city. The Sixth-Generation filmmakers in China draw on

noir images, but they also adopt neorealist and documentary styles to critique the shining image of the city of neoliberal capitalism. In Mumbai too, Mazumdar shows, it is not the classic dystopic form but images of collision, friction, and the grotesque that represent the urban experience. While drawing from international styles, these portraits in the Urban Fringe cinema draw their meanings by breaking from the codes of melodrama. In short, the essays collectively show that while cinema functions as a global language, particular historical situations have fashioned specific aesthetic devices to offer critical visions of the city.

### **Imaging Urban Crisis**

Crisis signifies a turning point, the irruption of a moment of stress, volatility, and disintegration. What is particular about the experience of urban crisis under modernity is its expression in images. Marx wrote insightfully about commodity fetishism, but it was Walter Benjamin who developed this insight into the idea of the phantasmagoria as an allegory of modernity, viewing commodity culture as “a projection—not a reflection—of the economy” and understanding “the centrality, the constitutive force, of the image within modernity.”<sup>16</sup> If modern urban society is to be apprehended through its image life, then it is appropriate that contributors turn to representations of the experience of urban crisis.

David R. Ambaras offers an account of the critical representation of Tokyo’s urban experience as it grew rapidly during the 1920s and 1930s to become the showpiece of Japan’s imperial and cosmopolitan modernity. Dramatic urban growth and changing urban forms were accompanied by a proliferation in the city’s representation in geographical gazettes, urban plans, social surveys, professional bulletins, general-interest books and magazines, popular guides, movies, photographs, art, and the popular press. Drawing on James Donald’s argument that the city exists in the traffic between the urban fabric, representation, and imagination,<sup>17</sup> Ambaras sketches the experience of Tokyo as a place of anxiety and insecurity, of fear and horror, not progress. This experience was rooted in the “topographies of distress” that the daily press and popular magazines produced by sensationalizing dark and transgressive spaces and figures. Seizing on a spate of suspicious infant deaths in the poor neighborhood of Iwanosaka, the popular press fashioned and circulated dystopic images of everyday urban life in the slum.

With the historian’s instinct for context, Ambaras locates the media’s dark portraits of Iwanosaka against the background of the economic depression. But he does not read off the context of socioeconomic turmoil in the

texts of cultural representations. Instead, Ambaras reconstructs the history of image production, tracing connections between the media portraits of Iwanosaka and the representation of slums as monstrous, living hells by classic Western texts and Japanese writings on working-class life. The infant deaths crystallized these connections, resulting in the representation of Iwanosaka as a space of miserable tenements, sinister alleyways, beggars, prostitutes, and criminals. Fear, insecurity, and violence stalked the slum. This was not the experience of those who lived in Iwanosaka, but the representation of middle-class authors and readers who understood the neighborhood through these sensational and shocking images. Nevertheless, the Iwanosaka images, and the *fait divers* more broadly, exerted an anxious influence because, in view of the endemic economic crisis, the petty bourgeois readers could see in them the possibility of their own social collapse or descent into deviance. Thus, the portrait of the slum as the embodiment of urban horror emerged as a critique of urban conditions.

The dystopic image of the slum also figures prominently in contemporary pictures of urban crisis in cities of the global South. Jennifer Robinson subjects these representations to a trenchant critique to reveal their limitations. She points out that current urban writings suggest that dystopia is not a faraway, fictional place, in the future. Rather, it is already here, in Third World cities. Robinson acknowledges that Mike Davis's contemporary classic, *Planet of Slums*,<sup>18</sup> which envisions the urban future in light of the world's poorest regions, offers a biting critique of the disastrous effects of neoliberal capitalist globalization. However, it is also a perspective from the metropolitan West, alerting its inhabitants to what is coming their way from somewhere else. That somewhere else, she suggests, is typically Africa, a living dystopia of grinding poverty, exploitation, disorder, and violence. Unlike Rem Koolhaas, who sees the potential for innovative urban design in the chaos of Lagos, Davis views African cities as maps of a Dickensian hell that threaten to overrun the planet.

As against this disabling image of the "planet of slums," Robinson turns to the fiction of the South African writer Ivan Vladislavić to identify critical and enabling representations of Johannesburg's post-apartheid transition. Vladislavić's novel, *The Restless Supermarket*, concerns Hillbrow, a high-rise, low-income white neighborhood that experienced a change in its racial composition, first through the 1980s and then with the end of apartheid. Unlike the dystopic writings of the current urbanists, Vladislavić does not offer either a singular image of the city or the perspective of an outside narrator. He does not present the transition as a change from apartheid dystopia to post-apartheid utopia. Moving between the viewpoints of old and new residents, white and black, order and disorder, and real and fantastic spaces, Vladislavić

offers a complex, multivalent picture of Hillbrow's changeover, as well as a series of possible futures. We are not immobilized by the fearsome image of a dystopia with no exit.

Ravi Sundaram's essay brings the volume to a close with an account of the image of an urban breakdown in Delhi. He also begins with a critique of Mike Davis's apocalyptic scenario of urbanism in the periphery, pointing out that this is an image that urban planners and the old, reformist elites have adopted with a sense of melancholic resignation in the face of turbulent urban change. Classic modernist allegories of urban crisis, imaged in portraits of infrastructural decline and factories enveloped in ghostly silence, are of little use in the face of a heady mix of exploding urbanization and growing media sensorium. Dystopian sci-fi landscapes of conflicts between machines and humankind, darkness and light, are too outmoded and static for the experience of proliferation, implosion, and informality that characterize the urbanism of the global South.

Sundaram offers a reading of an unhinged, wild urbanism that emerged in Delhi during the 1980s and the 1990s. Under proliferating squatter settlements, illegal markets, and informal work, the dreams of modernist planners and bureaucratic elites unraveled. Gripped with a sense of urban crisis, the elites periodically unleash the force of law, bringing to light a vast, unauthorized city, characterized by Sundaram as a pirate city. Enmeshed in the urban sensorium of cassettes, mobile telephony, video and digital technologies, print, and television, this city is so deeply entangled in the pragmatic and viral media life that the classic dualisms of public-private, plan-counterplan, and order-chaos cannot capture its kinetic movement and elusiveness. It is this dynamic media city of informality, proliferation, speed, piracy, and commodity that appears in the sensational image of an out-of-control, delirious urban order, creating an endless loop between the material and the imaginary. Sundaram argues that in the face of this constellation that folds into itself the experience of urban crisis, the classic dystopic critique falls short.

The location of Sundaram's analysis at the level of the experience of the media city highlights this section's shared concern with the imaging of urban crisis. Treating critiques of urbanism at this level permits the contributors to interrogate the image-truth of the slum and the delirious urban order. This allows them to read what these images both disclosed and concealed. Thus, we learn from Ambaras that the while the projection of the slum as the iconic image of Tokyo's modernity undercut the narrative of progress, it also served as an elitist representation that expressed the fear of crime and immorality that they saw lurking in the poor neighborhood. Robinson and Sundaram also subject "the planet of slums" to a critical reading, but they do so by mounting counterimages of other urban experiences, thereby achieving a "profane illumination" of the representation of urban crisis.

What emerges clearly from this interdisciplinary exploration extending from Weimar urbanism to the media city of contemporary Delhi, from modernist architecture in Mexico City and film noir in Los Angeles to post-apartheid Johannesburg, from the slum images and sci-fi doom culture in Tokyo to dystopic landscapes of Chinese and Bombay cinema, is an uncanny alchemy between dark representations and the urban experience. Significantly, this uncanny alchemy is registered in the realm of images composed by photography, art, cinema, and architecture, for it is here that, as James Donald suggests,<sup>19</sup> the familiar turns unfamiliar, the city of planning and order gives way to the unsettling influence of dark mysteries and memories. As the contributors analyze the work of this urban alchemy in specific historical and global contexts, they reveal different shades and meanings of the uncanny. We learn that the opening that dystopic images provide for human agency inflects their critical meaning. Equally relevant is their aesthetics, developed in particular historical and formal situations, which offer portraits ranging from urban anxiety and nihilism to utopian desire, from scenes of dislocation and dispossession to “warped spaces” in which the urban uncanny appears as the nightmarish crisis of the human.<sup>20</sup> Finally, this volume shows that images of urban crisis, to return to the theme we began with, function as urban allegories that express the fear of the “unintended city,”<sup>21</sup> the city of slums and media sensorium. The cities of darkness, it turns out, reveal as much as they hide.

## Notes

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- 1 Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (New York: Verso, 2006).
- 2 For a historical examination of the classic image of the modern city, see Gyan Prakash, introduction to Gyan Prakash and Kevin Kruse, eds., *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1–18.
- 3 For “Generic City,” see Rem Koolhaas, “The Generic City,” in *S,M,L,XL* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1998), 1248–64. Frederic Jameson offers an insightful reading of Koolhaas’s urbanism in “Future City,” *New Left Review* 21 (May–June 2003): 65–79.
- 4 For careful and insightful recent interpretations of dystopia as a form, see Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); and Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, eds., *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
- 5 Eric Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 41. On the cultural matrix of Weimar urban modernity, see Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).