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BUILT METAPHORS - Gated communities and fiction

Abstract:

This paper examines the two-way interface between gated communities and fiction. We will look into fictions inspired by gated communities, and analyse gated communities themselves as fiction-derived environments.

The very principle of gated communities may have been invented by a social science fiction writer. It is novelistic *per se*, and automatically arouses imagination. Gated communities have inspired many science fiction writers and screenwriters, who used them as settings for a vast number of works. These include TV series (Michael Watkins' *X Files* episode "Arcadia"), films (Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*), TV films (*The Sect*), and novels (Neal Stephenson's *Snowcrash*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, James Graham Ballard's *Running Wild* and *Super-Cannes*). In these stories, gated communities are used as "a metaphor for the state of the world at the beginning of the 21st century"¹.

However, if gated communities are such a rich fictional environment, it is because their physical configurations embody narrative schemes that were present in western fiction long before they became ubiquitous in the real world. Before we heard of their existence, we were already subconsciously aware of their potential storylines.

Several archetypal stories can be considered. One is the "Noah's ark" scenario: in a world that has turned crazy, a group builds a microcosm or a survival city to protect themselves. Very close to this scenario is the myth of the small groups of adventurers, settlers or astronauts who, in an uncountable number of stories, leave society to create a "paradise on earth" in the form of an isolated ideal community.

¹ Sarah Blandy, "Enemies within? Gated communities unhinged", Paper presented to the Housing Studies Association Autumn Conference, September 4/5 2001, Cardiff, "Housing Imaginations: new concepts, new theories, new researchers".

Another is the “Agatha Christie” scenario: a small group living in isolation develops a kind of collective madness, ending up murdering themselves². The Hollywoodian version of this story shows a too-perfect community that gradually degenerates as hidden secrets come to the surface. The inhabitants end up prisoners of their dream, as in Bryan Forbes’ *The Stepford Wives*, in which all women are changed into robots. There are also science fiction versions of the same scenario (Robert Silverberg’s *The World Inside*, George Romero’s *Land of the Dead*).

Finally, there is the “Metropolis” scenario, in which the poor and the rich (or the honest and the criminals) live in physically separated sections of the city, as in Fritz Lang’s movie, Paul Grimault’s *Le Roi et l’Oiseau*, or Carpenter’s *Escape from New York*.

The realisation of fictional storylines is a subject that deserves further study. Gated communities inhabitants cannot ignore (whether this knowledge is conscious or not) that they reproduce a fictional universe. They make these fictional fantasies and fears real, living in a built metaphor.

² Suggested by Yves Guermond, 2003.

BUILT METAPHORS - Gated communities and fiction

INTRODUCTION

The fictional dimension of the gated communities is very important:

- They have been used in an explicit way in at least 11 novels³, 6 films⁴ and 4 televised series⁵.
- To market them, the real estate developers often use metaphors: « bubble », « oasis », « island », « paradise » ;
- Journalistic descriptions often come close to fiction, presenting them as « new fortresses », « wealthy ghettos » or « private cities » ;
- Researchers⁶ also use very strong words, which provoke the imagination : « fortress »⁷, « private governments »⁸ « prison »⁹.

The subject appears fictional *per se*. Why does it arouse imagination so much?

³ J.G. Ballard, *Running Wild*, 1988 ; Neal Stephenson, *Snowcrash*, 1992 ; Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, 1993 ; T.C. Boyle, *América*, 1995 ; J.G. Ballard, *Cocaine nights*, 1996 ; Stuart Woods, *Orchid Beach*, 1998 ; J.G. Ballard, *Super-Cannes*, 2000 ; J.G. Ballard, *Millenium People*, 2003 ; Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, 2003 ; John Katzenbach, *State of mind*, 2004 ; Claudia Piñeiro, *Las Viudas de los Jueves*, 2005.

⁴ Wes Craven, *Invitation to Hell*, 1984 ; John Duigan, *Lawn dogs*, 1997 ; Peter Weir, *The Truman show*, 1998 ; *The Sect*, 1999 ; Hervé Palud, *Albert est méchant*, 2004 ; George Romero, *Land of the Dead*, 2005.

⁵ Michael Watkins, *X Files*, episode "Arcadia", 1999 ; *Spongebob Squarepants*, episode "Squidville", 2001 ; Josh Schwartz, *The O.C.*, 2003 ; Jenji Kohan, *Weeds*, 2005. Gated community is the place for all *Weeds* and *The O.C.*'s episodes. *Desperate Housewives* takes place in a planned community ; there is no indication that the community is gated, but the scenario relies on the idea of a small, closed world.

⁶ Guénola Capron et al., *Quand la ville se ferme : Quartiers résidentiels sécurisés*, Rosny-sous-Bois, Bréal, 2006, p.21.

⁷ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz : Excavating the Future in Los Angeles*, London, Vintage, 1990 ; Edward Blakely and Mary Gail Snyder, *Fortress America, Gated Communities in the United States*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution Press, 1997.

⁸ Evan McKenzie, *Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government*, New Haven-London, Yale University Press, 1994.

⁹ GUST (Ghent Urban Studies Team), *The Urban Condition : Space, Community and Self in the Contemporary Metropolis*, Rotterdam, 010 Publishers, 1999 ; Stéphane Degoutin, *Prisonniers volontaires du rêve américain*, Paris, La Villette, 2006.

The association of the words « gate » and « community » is not just a descriptive expression, it already tells a story by linking the universal symbolic of the gate with the idea of community (with the many meanings the term evokes, in a north american context)¹⁰. Publicists know that the best way to market a product is to tell a story about it (what they call storytelling¹¹). This is how one gains the empathy of the public, which facilitates identification and memorizing of the product. In this regard, « gated community » is an efficient slogan.

Gated communities constitute a « natural » frame for fiction. It has always been easier to write a fiction that takes place in a closed and limited perimeter. This point has been set as a rule in classic french theater. Gated communities respond to the French classical theater's requirement of the « *unité de lieu* », according to which all the action must take place in a single location.

In the works of fiction, gated communities are often used in order to point some revealing aspects of the contemporary society or its future, as « a metaphor for the state of the world at the beginning of the 21st century »¹². Many of these stories¹³ belong to the genre of social science-fiction¹⁴. The very principle of *gated communities* may have been invented by a social science fiction writer trying to imagine how the social relationships will evolve in the future¹⁵.

However, when one examines these fictions, one is struck by the frequent reuse of ancient narrative patterns. If gated communities are such a rich fictional environment, it is because their physical configurations embody narrative schemes that were present in western fiction long before they became ubiquitous in the real world. Before we heard of their existence, we were already subconsciously aware of their potential storylines.

Timeless metaphors

The goal of this paper is to see in which kinds of fictions the topic is used, and to identify the « pre-written scenarios », or narrative patterns, which are embedded in the idea of gated community. Gated communities inspire fictions ; these fictions are based on former scenarios ; they influence our vision and our thoughts of the gated communities.

¹⁰ One could have said differently : walled district, fenced suburb or enclosed neighborhood... which tell different stories.

¹¹ See Christian Salmon, « The Storytelling Machine », *Le Monde Diplomatique*, nov. 2006, p.18-19.

¹² Sarah Blandy, « Enemies within? Gated communities unhinged », paper presented to the Housing Studies Association Autumn Conference, September 4-5 2001, Cardiff, « Housing Imaginations: new concepts, new theories, new researchers ».

¹³ The *X Files* episode « Arcadia », Peter Weir's *The Truman Show*, the tv-film *The Sect*, Neal Stephenson's *Snowcrash*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, J.G. Ballard's *Running Wild* and *Super-Cannes*.

¹⁴ « Social science-fiction » is Isaac Asimov's expression, in « Fiction: Its Meaning and Its Future », *Modern Science*, Reginald Bretnor, 1953.

¹⁵ Is Mike Davis a science-fiction writer ? Like them, he uses real facts, that he thinks are significant about the future of the city. These facts are real but their choice is one-sided, since Davis considers that the city is going to hell anyway.

The images used to describe the gated communities (oasis, bubble, fortress, labyrinth, paradise...) are fundamental metaphors or « canonical figures of space »¹⁶. The same applies to narrative patterns and scenarios used by novelists and film directors (enclosed city, unreachable castle, blockade, strong-box-village...).

According to Jorge Luis Borges, it might be an error to think that one can invent new metaphors, since the true ones, those that reveal intimate connections between two images, have always existed¹⁷. We postulate, with Borges, that the more effective stories exemplify recurrent, if not universal themes. Those regularly give birth to different scenarios. We will examine more in detail three of them : « Noah's Ark », « Island » and « *Huis-clos* » (behind closed doors).

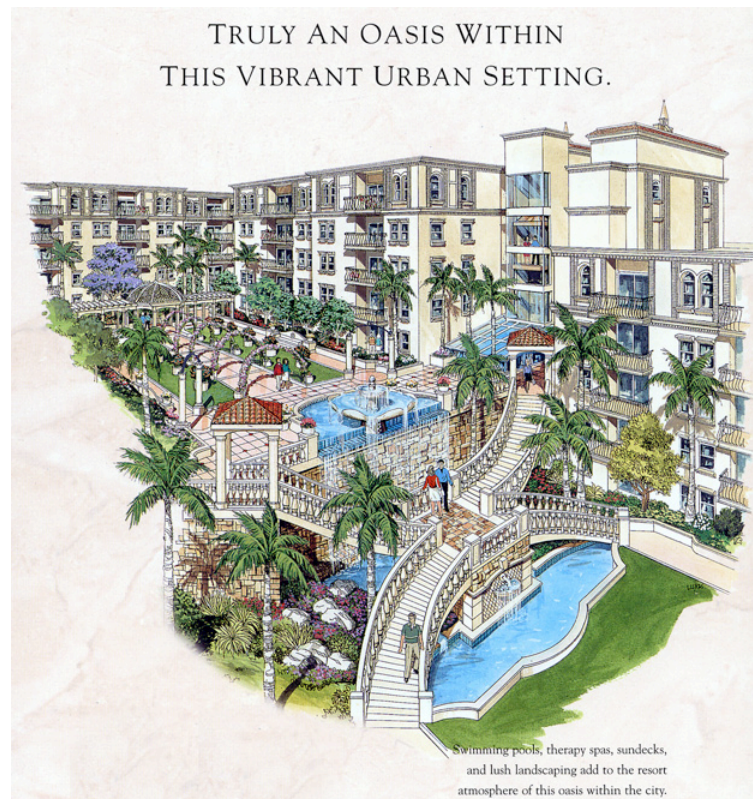


Illustration 1 : Medici, Los Angeles.

Source: Western National Group - Los Angeles

¹⁶ Anne-Marie Eyssartel, lecture at the Ecole d'Architecture de Paris La Villette, march 15th, 2007.

¹⁷ « Nathaniel Hawthorne », in *Enquêtes*, Paris, Gallimard, 1992, p.78.

1 NOAH'S ARK

Many stories that make use of gated communities or closed cities implicitly or explicitly refer to the myth of Noah's Ark : in a world that has turned crazy, a group builds a microcosm or a survival city to protect themselves. Very close to this scenario is the myth of small groups of adventurers, settlers or astronauts who, in an uncountable number of stories, leave society to create a « paradise on earth » in the form of an isolated ideal community. According to Peter Sloterdijk, the Arch is « an artificial and hermetically sealed world that could become, under certain circumstances, the only conceivable environment »¹⁸. The community closes itself to form a basic cell which goal is to preserve a representative sample of « civilisation », in hope for a better world to come.

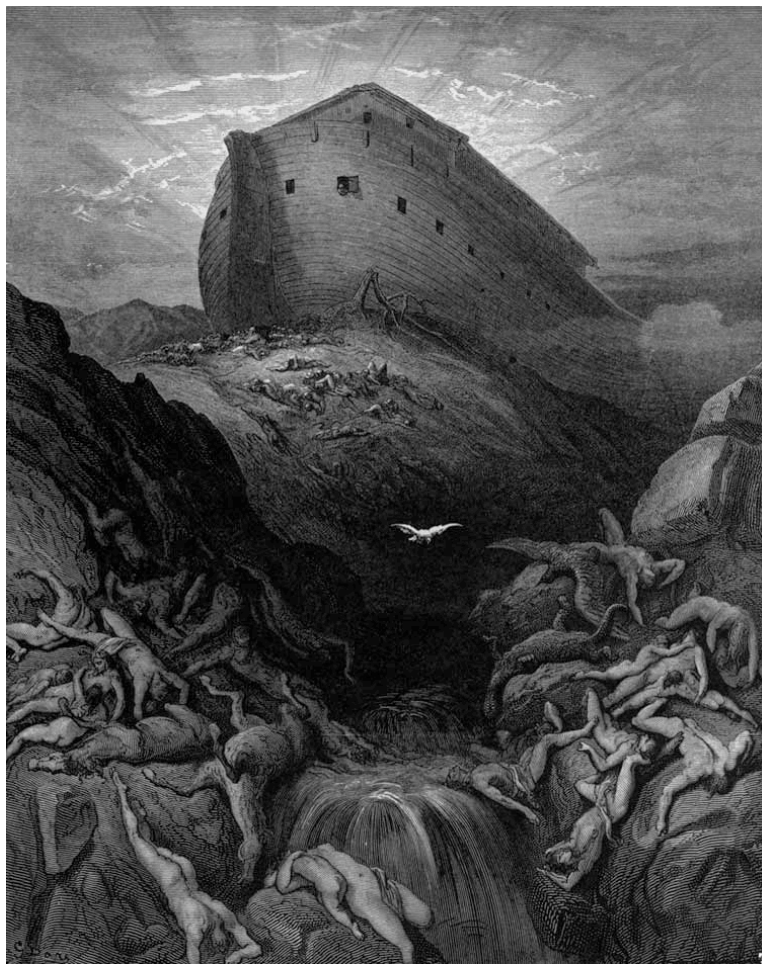


Illustration 2 : Gustave Doré, « Le lâcher de la colombe ».

¹⁸ in Axel Sowa, « Editorial », *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, nov. 2005, p.34-35.

Stories focus on a primitive force, the instinct of survival, and insist on the techniques of protection to face the external danger. Dangers themselves are very diversified : crime having become ubiquitous (*Parable of the Sower*¹⁹, *Mad Max 2*²⁰), fall of a giant asteroid (*Deep Impact*²¹), planetary catastrophe (*The Inverted World*²², *Malevil*²³), shortage of the basic resources (*The World Inside*²⁴), terrorism (*Globalia*²⁵), malefic creatures (*The Village*²⁶), invasion of the zombies (*Land of the Dead*²⁷)... In all cases, the world as we know it is under threat, it is necessary to find refuge in a protected environment.

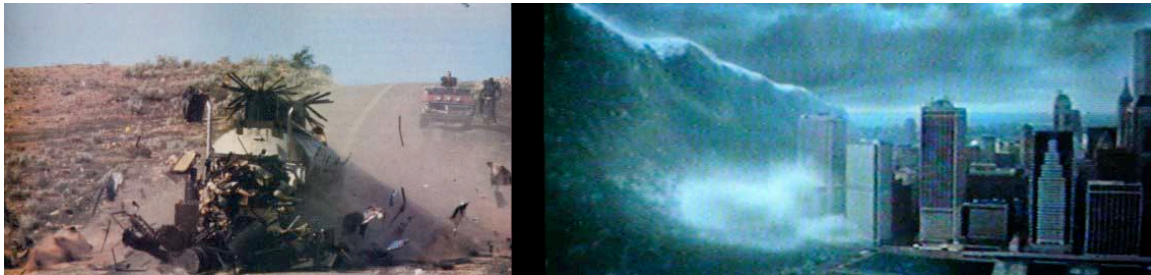


Illustration 3 : Apocalyptic climate in *Mad Max II* and *Deep Impact*.

1.1 Survival communities

The shelter strengthens.

Gaston Bachelard²⁸

In her novel *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia Butler explicitly compares the walled communities with Noah's Ark and reuses the narrative structure of the biblical myth. In

¹⁹ Octavia Butler, *Parable of the Sower*, New York, Warner Books, 1993.

²⁰ George Miller, *Mad Max 2 : The Road Warrior*, 1981.

²¹ Mimi Leder, *Deep Impact*, 1998.

²² Christopher Priest, *The Inverted world*, Harper & Row, 1974.

²³ Robert Merle, *Malevil*, Paris, Gallimard, 1972.

²⁴ Robert Silverberg, *The World inside*, I Books, 2004.

²⁵ Jean-Christophe Rufin, *Globalia*, Paris, Gallimard, 2003.

²⁶ M. Night Shyamalan, *The Village*, 2004.

²⁷ George A. Romero, *Land of the Dead*, 2005.

²⁸ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, p. 61.

the Bible, Noah represents the only just, from which humanity is rebuilt. In *Parable of the Sower*, this role is held by Lauren, the main protagonist.

The novel opens on the description of a small gated community in the periphery of Los Angeles in 2025, in a context of widespread insecurity that recalls of *Mad Max 2*²⁹. Social bonds have almost completely disappeared and the society returned to a tribal system. The gated community is frequently attacked by hordes of plunderers. Lauren tries to organize the defense of her neighbourhood by mobilizing each person over eighteen. However, in such a context, the walls are not enough any more to ensure the protection : « In L.A. some walled communities bigger and stronger than this one just aren't there any more. Nothing left but ruins, rats, and squatters »³⁰. Lauren's community is sacked too : « Last night, when I escaped from the neighbourhood, it was burning. The houses, the trees, the people : burning. [...] Everything was chaos. »³¹

With a small group, Lauren then fled out of the barbarian and hostile megalopolis. They set apart, to hide from the world, and organize a network of surveillance. This community allows them to found a new society, which the development is described in *Parable of the Talents* (continuation of *Parable of the Sower*). Primitive fears revive the search for a protective shelter : inside the community, the house is conceived as a zone of major protection.



Illustration 4 : Noah's Ark in *Deep Impact*, directed by Mimi Leder, 1998.

« The government conducts a lottery to randomly select 800,000 ordinary Americans to join 200,000 pre-selected scientists, engineers, teachers, artists, soldiers and officials. These people will be part of a worldwide effort to save humanity from extinction in special underground shelters that have been built in Missouri and other areas as a contingency. »³²

1.2 Real and imaginary dangers

In *Parable of the Sower*, locking up, is the response to the fear of a real danger. In the following examples, the fear of the outside world is based on exaggerated, erroneous or

²⁹ George Miller, *Mad Max 2 : The Road Warrior* 1981. *Mad Max 2* uses the archetypal pattern of a besieged community of decent people who need protection against vicious bandits who are rescued by a hardened man who rediscovers his humanity.

³⁰ Octavia E. Butler, *Parabole of the Sower*, Warner Books, 1995, p.49.

³¹ Octavia E. Butler, *Parabole of the Sower*, Warner Books, 1995, p.137.

³² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deep_Impact_%28film%29 (accessed may 2007).

imaginary dangers. Yet, the fear is always described as the motive that leads to the construction of autonomous communities.

The film *The Village*³³ by M. Night Shyamalan describes a small isolated community that lives in the terror of malefic creatures supposed to inhabit the surrounding woods. This threat prohibits them to venture outside the village, which forces them to live in complete autarky, the outside being absolutely taboo. This (imaginary) danger enables them to maintain a safety perimeter and to perpetuate their way of life, refusing the modern society. One can understand this scenario as a parody of the American agrarian ideal and the demonization of the cities. It can also be read as a disguised criticism of the residential enclavement and the gated communities.



Illustration 5 : M. Night Shyamalan, *The Village*, 2004.

Christopher Priest's science fiction novel, *The Inverted World*³⁴, presents a very similar starting point : an enclosed and autistic city, where no one is ever supposed to see outside the city bonds, except the members of the « guilds » ; and symmetrically the true nature of the city should not be known of by any outsider. One learns quickly that the city is in fact a huge vehicle in motion, moving on rails, a Noah's Ark that transports the last civilized inhabitants of the Earth. It passes through primitive territories. Outside, there is no central government. The natives (« tooks ») live in villages. They are described as very poor and underfed, living in a state of eternal lethargy³⁵. The city produces its own nuclear energy and recycles water and sewers to produce synthetic food³⁶. It repeats *ad infinitum* an identical way of life, closed on itself. The Noah's Ark has proved too efficient, creating an autonomous world that carries on its own folly without questioning the reasons that once justified it, blind to the fact that the disaster belongs to the past.

³³ M. Night Shyamalan, *The Village*, 2004.

³⁴ Christopher Priest, *The Inverted world*, Harper & Row, 1974.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

Jean-Christophe Rufin's novel *Globalia*³⁷ depicts a planetary network of interconnected cities, preserved under a enormous, fully secured glass roof. This network is separated from the external « non zones », which are empty savage spaces, returned to a state of nature, which access is forbidden. Globalia's government succeeds in creating complete safety and ensuring the stability of an elitist state. But how to justify imprisonment ? How to avoid lethargy in an enclosed place where freedom, security and prosperity are guaranteed ? To create the necessary amount of anxiety, the government directs fake terrorist attacks, allotted to the « New Enemy ». Real facts and rumors reinforce each other. A collective fear, fueled by the phantasms of safety, is created to serve the power.

In Dino Buzzati's novel *The Tartar Steppe*³⁸, the sentinels of the Bastiani Fort, insulated in the middle of a desert, watch out endlessly for a danger which remains invisible. The main character observes, during full years, the movement of mysterious small black spots which could have been a sign of a Tartar invasion. By dint of waiting it, the danger becomes desirable : it is the justification of the daily surveillance, the island which one would like to see after days and nights of an ever similar landscape.



Illustration 6 : Valerio Zurlini, *The Tartar Steppe* (based on the Dino Buzzati 's novel), 1976.

In these four examples, the external danger is invented or imaginary, but the myth of an unbearable outside justifies the inhabitant's will for safety, their desire to live together and maintain the community in state of alert.

But if, according to Gaston Bachelard « fear is the being itself »³⁹, if it does not come from the outside but from the inside, then « in which outside could one escape ? In which sanctuary could one find a refuge ? The whole space is nothing else than an "horrible outwards-inside" »⁴⁰. All these scenarios illustrate a vicious circle : enclosure can only reinforce fear, which results in reinforcing enclosure.

³⁷ Jean-Christophe Rufin, *Globalia*, Paris, Gallimard, 2003.

³⁸ Dino Buzzati, *Il deserto dei Tartari*, 1940.

³⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace*, Paris, PUF, 1957, p.196.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.196.

In his novel *The Tortilla Curtain*⁴¹, T.C. Boyle describes the process of the rise of fear in a more realistic situation. Delaney, the narrator, writes a column for a nature magazine and lives with his wife in the Arroyo Blanco community, in the hills of Los Angeles. The majority of the homeowners in the community decide to erect a wall supposed to protect them from the snakes and coyotes living in the hills. At first, Delaney is hostile to the wall : he is conscious that what his neighbours are trying to keep at distance is not the coyotes but rather the Hispanics and the Blacks. The wall is built nevertheless, and the community closes itself as a strange trap on its inhabitants. Delaney feels locked in, as if he was buried alive and unable to react.

However, progressively, Delaney and his wife become permeated by the climate of fear. The rumors of insecurity make the community increasingly more vulnerable. On the other hand, the community appears as a providential and protective shell. From the moment when the process of enclosure is set in motion, it goes ever quicker. Enclosure justifies itself.

Noah's Ark is a mean to preserve a piece of civilization in an apocalyptic world. In this scenario, gated communities appear as a refuge, a peaceful place in the midst of a barbarian and dangerous urban environment. This logic requires to demonize the outside world and to exaggerate the importance of the external dangers (whether they are real or imagined). The territories which remain open are perceived as not civilized, dangerous, or more basically still, alien, no-go areas. The enclosures of the gated communities then evoke irresistibly, wrongly or rightly, the role of the ancient walls of cities, when they were « shelters against the brutality of the hinterland »⁴².



Illustration 7 : Noah's Ark at the Coney Island amusement Park.

⁴¹ T.C Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain*, Viking Press, 1995.

⁴² Sophie Body-Gendrot, lecture at the conference « The privatization of cities in a historical perspective », june 3rd - 4th, 2004, La Sorbonne, Paris.

2 ISLAND

There was something magical about an island – the mere word suggested fantasy. You lost touch with the world – an island was a world of its own. A world perhaps, from which you might never return.

Agatha Christie⁴³

The links between the figure island, the gated communities and fiction are extremely tight, sometimes even intermingled. We will first of all see that the figure of the gated community is the urban equivalent of the island, then that the island is the fictional territory *per se*, and finally which scenarios it embodies.

It is not always possible to draw a clear line between fictional islands and the insular urban environments : several of the latter are rooted in fiction (Disneyland), are real islands (the gated communities of Sailfish Point or River Reach), use the symbolic of the island (the gated community Wilton Station, Florida, which nickname is « The Island City ») or are, at the same time, real islands and fictional environments (The World in Dubai).

The island is emblematic of the suburban territories in general. The metaphor of the island is frequently used by researchers to designate the components of the urban archipelago⁴⁴. Indeed, every component of the sprawling metropolis can be considered as an island, since it requires the use of a motor vehicle to connect with the surrounding territory. The different parts of the city are not linked in an immediate or organic way. The use of the car automatically reconfigures the city (whether recent or not) in the form of physically enclaved, independent islands. The components of the city have adapted to this insular logic : they are of limited size, directed towards the interior rather than towards the outside, independent and functionally specialized. The whole suburban process consists in building « islands on the land »⁴⁵. Gated communities represent the height of this logic.

⁴³ *And Then There Were None*, Happer Collins, London, 2003, p. 46.

⁴⁴ For example: Bruno Fortier (*L'amour des villes*, Liège, Mardaga, 1994), Olivier Dollfus (*La Nouvelle Carte du monde*, Paris, PUF, 1996), Jean-Pierre Pranas-Descours (*The Archipelago-City / L'archipel métropolitain*), Cristian Suau (« Nordic cities... Suburban culture or a life in the archipelago city », doctorate programme, Barcelona School of Architecture, 2005), W. Arets et S.U. Barbieri, (*The possibility of an absolute architecture: the archipelago city and its project*, Doctoral thesis), etc.

⁴⁵ « Islands on the land », to speak in the words of Carey MacWilliams (*Southern California Country, an Island on the Land*, New York, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1946).

2.1 The ideal gated community is an island

The island represents the even essence of the ideal, protected and peaceful place, a refuge, a permanent Noah's Ark, inaccessible to the unrest and the disorders of the world. The search for a desert or unknown island is one of the fundamental topics of literature, dreams, desires⁴⁶.

A Wikipedia page proposes an inventory of 25 private islands owned by celebrities⁴⁷. The island appears as the expected place of residence to an elite, where one can withdraw oneself out from the pressure of mediatization and society.

The notion of refuge is very closely linked to the idea of gated community : refuge against megalopolis, against crime etc. Although they are not surrounded by water, gated communities have all the characteristics of islands. It is noteworthy that several of them were created on actual islands or peninsulas, the natural insulation being reinforced by the access control. It is the case of Sailfish Point, which contains a golf course and a marina, and might stand for the idea of gated community pushed at its maximum ; or River Reach, built on an artificial island in Florida.



Illustration 8 : Sailfish Point, Florida.

⁴⁶ See Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, « Ile », in *Dictionnaire des symboles*, Paris, Robert Lafont, 1982, p.519-520 (first published 1969).

⁴⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Private_island (accessed may 2007).



Illustration 9 : River Reach, Florida.

In old Europe, where urban configurations are more often the result of a long and slow historical evolution, it is interesting to observe that some of the places where the elites choose to live together are established in islands. Some of the English 'Channel Islands' function in a very similar way to gated communities, although generally used as second homes, because of their location outside of the city. It is the case, for example, of the islands of Guernesay or Bréhat, which could be called « natural » or « non premeditated » gated communities.

Conversely, gated communities are adapted to more recent urban situations, or to countries having experienced abrupt social changes, which hastled the relations between the citizens, as it is the case in South America or in South Africa.

Real estate developers have found, in the principle of gated communities, the means of creating environments of exception *ex nihilo*, in infinite numbers, as many as needed to satisfy the market. Territorial insulation allows the creation of peaceful and controllable communities, out of the world, equivalent to islands. One can regard them as synthetic islands, a process allowing to manufacture islands on a dry and firm ground.

2.2 The island, fictional territory *par excellence*

The island is an exceptionally effective starting point for fiction. A Wikipedia page lists 141 « fictional islands »⁴⁸, from Plato's Atlantis to *Myst*⁴⁹, not to forget Neverland⁵⁰,

⁴⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fictional_islands (accessed May 2007).

*Treasure Island*⁵¹ or *The Invention of Morel*⁵². Several narrative patterns can be identified. The relation to the idea of gated community appears clearly :

- The island as a different world
- The island as utopia
- The island as a reduced world
- The island as a trap
- The island as a prison

2.3 The island as a different world

Many fictions have used the idea that there would exist unknown territories, sheltering extraordinary populations or paradisiac territories. Because of the discontinuity it embodies, the island is the perfect set for a different society. It is the unreachable or forgotten place where other human beings would have evolved differently, where norms are inverted. This scheme is best used in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's travels*⁵³, in which each of the islands Gulliver visits opens doors to another universe, where common laws are altered.

The island permits the fantastic, the unbelievable, the unthinkable. That is why it is one of the most commonly used sets for fantastic literature. It symbolizes a place where one can hide to set up machiavelic plans, insane scientific experiences etc.

In the virtual world Second Life⁵⁴, many of the territories for sale are islands. Second Life islands represent at the same time the possibility to create a different world and, more basically, an ideal place of residence.

2.4 The island as utopia

Ever since Plato's Atlantis, insulation is a recurring element of the utopian literature, its almost compulsory set (More⁵⁵, Bacon⁵⁶, etc.) : the ideal society can only be built in a

⁴⁹ In the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, ab. 340 BC.

⁵⁰ Fictional island featured in James M. Barrie's play *Peter Pan*, 1904.

⁵¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, 1883.

⁵² Adolfo Bioy Casares, *The Invention of Morel*, 1940.

⁵³ Jonathan Swift, *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World, in Four Parts, by Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and Then a Captain of Several Ships*, 1726.

⁵⁴ www.secondlife.com

remote territory, out of reach of the known world, in an unreachable island that obeys to its own laws and allows to create a world in itself.

Thomas More's *Utopia* resembles the puritanical communities founded by Englishmen in the United States during the XVIIth century. As a perfect place, *Utopia* admits nothing external to itself : it is to itself its own reality, according to Louis Marin⁵⁷. More's book describes the regulations of a society where happiness is organized for all, a place whose inhabitants may be rather called a happy nation than either eminent or famous.

The utopian genre, forgotten since Greek Antiquity, reappeared in the occidental litterature shortly after the discovery of America. Thomas More wrote *Utopia* in 1516, after he heard a description of America given by a navigator. The United States still tend to see themselves as an utopian territory, an island remote from the rest of the world⁵⁸. And it is in the United States that many insular urban forms have been created : Manhattan Island, Coney Island, Disneyland, the modern gated communities, office campuses, malls etc.

Theme parks, physical places which are deeply rooted in fiction, were compared with islands by Anne-Marie Eyssartel et Bernard Rochette⁵⁹, because of their insulated position in the urban territory. The goal of the first Disneyland park was to create a place of rest and magic, an enchanted pause in everyday life, a refuge in opposition to the megalopolis of Los Angeles, that Walt Disney hated. In Orlando's Magic Kingdom, insularity is emphasized by the fact that one enters by boat, after a short ride on a lake. The purpose of insularity is, here again, to create a world in itself, or more precisely, « an antiworld contained in ours »⁶⁰. According to Peter Marcuse, this is the very principle of utopia : « the determinate sociohistorical negation of what exists »⁶¹.

Disneyland carries to an extreme the principles of insularity, fictional territory and utopia. We showed elsewhere the similarities in the configuration of Disneyland and gated communities⁶². These last use the distinctive configuration of the theme parks (an island that contains a labyrinth). Insularity is created by enclosure, interior labyrinth by noodle streets and cul-de-sacs, and the idea of an antiworld by the rules and regulations edicted by the homeowner associations. If Disneyland is the criticism of Los Angeles, gated communities are the antidote to megalopolises and open society.

⁵⁵ *Utopia*, first published 1516.

⁵⁶ *The New Atlantis*, first published 1626.

⁵⁷ Louis Marin, *Utopiques : Jeux d'espaces*, Paris, Minuit, p. 137.

⁵⁸ According to Franck-Dominique Vivien and Lionel Quesne (1998), the American territory relies on « some of the fundamentals of classical utopia [...] : setting apart from an ancient corrupted world, left to found a perfect virgin society spared from the original sin. »

⁵⁹ Anne-Marie Eyssartel & Bernard Rochette, *Des Mondes inventés : Les parcs à thème*, Paris, La Villette, 1992.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶¹ « The end of utopia », in *Five lectures*, Boston, Beacon, 1970.

⁶² Stéphane Degoutin, *Prisonniers volontaires du rêve américain*, Éditions de la Villette, Paris, 2006.

2.5 The island as a reduced world

One of the most explicit symbols is the idea of the island as microcosm, as a totality, or a self sufficient world. Besides, many fictional islands have a circular shape, which reinforces the symbol⁶³. The will to create a world in itself can also be found in theme parks : to give the illusion of a parallel world, the park has to appear as complex as the world itself.

This idea of a miniature world is two sided. On the positive side, it is the idea that the territory can be mastered, domesticated. When visiting a gated community, one might intuitively wish to pace up and down, to know the entire place, as to appropriate it or to confirm its finiteness.

On the negative side, it is the idea that the world is limited. In several fictions, the world is limited to the territory of the island. Nothing goes out of the limits. People live in a vacuum (we will develop this idea in the third part of this paper). The whole story of the film *The Truman Show* takes place in the narrow territory of an artificial peninsula. Since his birth, Truman lives in the center of a secured bubble built for him alone, in which everyone watches over to reproduce the same way of life, where all neighbours smile, where no problem can occur to corrupt the perfection and the normal course of events. This delirious system was conceived for a tv-reality show, « *The Truman Show* », in which Truman is filmed every minute of his life.



Illustration 10 : Peter Weir, *The Truman Show*, 1998.

In « *The World* » project of Dubai, reality catches up literally with the metaphor. The idea of a world in reduction gives birth to an archipelago reproducing the shape of a

⁶³ The symbolic of the circular plan is universal, even if it has been more deeply scrutinized in China.

planisphere, where the continents and countries are subdivided in islands, each containing a small development of « luxury mass produced » villas. The World inherits from both the logic of the theme parks and the logic of the suburban developments, to create a fictional insular universe. Here, the art of manufacturing residential islands reaches its height : The World might become the largest, most secured, richest gated community, in the largest artificial island ever.



Illustration 11 : Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Nakheel Corp., « The World »

2.6 The island as a trap

Best of an island is once you get there – you can't go any farther...
you've come to the end of things...

Agatha Christie⁶⁴

If the island represents the place for utopia, for the ideal environment, its natural enclosure can turn it into its opposite : a deadly trap. The symbolic of the island lies in the contradiction between these two aspects, the ambiguous desire for a closed paradise, the tension between paradise and trap. This tension constitutes one of the most common narrative patterns in the fictions which depict gated communities.

It can lead to two scenarios : either the island is first a trap, and then becomes a livable place, or, conversely, it is initially presented as a paradise, that turns out to be a trap.

⁶⁴ *And Then There Were None*, Harper Collins, London, 2003, p. 97.

The novel *Robinson Crusoe*⁶⁵ uses the first scenario : the island symbolises the place where the human being can reinvent himself, starting from scratch. *And then there were none* uses the second scenario. The island is described as an ideal hideaway of a mysterious billionaire « sometimes cut off for a week or more. »⁶⁶, before to turn into a mortal trap.

2.7 The island as a prison

The theme of the island as prison is very common, but less fictional, since many prison islands have existed in reality. However, John Carpenter succeeded in turning this idea into an original scenario in his science fiction films *Escape from New York*⁶⁷ and *Escape from L.A.*⁶⁸ (the latter being a partial remake of the first one). In *Escape from New York*, the crime rate in New York has gone up so high that it has been decided to transform the whole island of Manhattan into a jail, surrounded by a 15 meter wall. In *Escape from L.A.*, the action takes place after a gigantic earthquake which has entirely separated the city from the continent. The reactionary president considers the cataclysm as a divine punishment, and the island also becomes a prison.

⁶⁵ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719.

⁶⁶ Agatha Christie, *And Then There Where None*, Happer Collins, London, 2003, p. 39.

⁶⁷ John Carpenter, 1981.

⁶⁸ John Carpenter, 1996.

3 HUIS-CLOS

Stories that take place behind closed doors are very frequent, since it allows to limit both the intrigue and the characters in a single place. Among them, one can isolate three typical scenarios, that more specifically recall the idea of gated community. The generic scheme is « trapped behind closed doors ». The trap can be physical, when a population or a group finds itself captive of a city, a building, or a vehicle (*The Plague*⁶⁹, *2001 : A Space Odyssey*⁷⁰, *The Lost Ones*⁷¹, *The Towering Inferno*⁷², *Shivers*⁷³, *Alien*⁷⁴, *The Thing*⁷⁵, *The People Under the Stairs*⁷⁶, *Battle Royale*⁷⁷ ; *Escape from L.A.*⁷⁸, *Land of the dead*⁷⁹, *Die Hard*⁸⁰, *Cube*⁸¹, *Amityville*⁸², *Scream*⁸³, *Halloween*⁸⁴, *Fear*⁸⁵, *Penthouse, Assault on Precinct 13*⁸⁶, etc.). But the trap can also result merely from the gathering of individuals, an idea that Jean-Paul Sartre's play *No Exit*⁸⁷ conveys with a perfect conciseness. Many fictions make use of the theme « danger came from the inside » or the alternative of the « too perfect world » : an ideal community hides a terrible secret, a crack that undermines it ; and/or its inhabitants develop a form of collective madness (*The Stepford Wives*⁸⁸, *Desperate housewives*⁸⁹, *Invitation to Hell*⁹⁰, *The Sect*⁹¹, *Weeds*⁹²,

⁶⁹ Albert Camus, 1947.

⁷⁰ Stanley Kubrick, 1968.

⁷¹ Samuel Beckett, *Le Dépeupleur* (*The Lost Ones*), 1970.

⁷² John Guillermin et Irwin Allen, 1974.

⁷³ David Cronenberg, 1975.

⁷⁴ Ridley Scott, 1979.

⁷⁵ John Carpenter, 1982.

⁷⁶ Wes Craven, 1991.

⁷⁷ Kinji Fukasaku, 2000.

⁷⁸ John Carpenter, 1996.

⁷⁹ George A. Romero, 2005.

⁸⁰ John McTiernan, 1988.

⁸¹ Vincenzo Natali, 1997.

⁸² Stuart Rosenberg, *The Amityville Horror*, 1979.

⁸³ Wes Craven, *Scream*, 1996, *Scream 2*, 1997, *Scream 3*, 2000.

⁸⁴ John Carpenter, 1978.

⁸⁵ James Foley, 1996.

⁸⁶ John Carpenter, 1976.

⁸⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Huis-clos*, 1944

⁸⁸ Frank Oz, 2004.

⁸⁹ Marc Cherry, 2004-2008.

⁹⁰ Wes Craven, 1984.

⁹¹ Unidentified director, 1999.

*Safe*⁹³, *X Files* episode « Arcadia »⁹⁴, *Shivers*⁹⁵, *Super-Cannes*⁹⁶, *Running Wild*⁹⁷, *The Truman Show*⁹⁸...). Finally, in the « *Metropolis* » scenario, the *huis-clos* is the place of territorial exclusion : cleavages between social classes have intensified so much that they live completely separated within the same cities (*Metropolis*, *The King and the Mockingbird*⁹⁹, *Soylent Green*¹⁰⁰, *Escape from New York*¹⁰¹, *Snow Crash*¹⁰², *The Tortilla Curtain*¹⁰³, *The O.C.*¹⁰⁴, *13th District*¹⁰⁵, *Weeds*¹⁰⁶, *Land of the Dead*...).

3.1 Trapped behind closed doors

The narrative pattern of the protective environment that turns into a trap can be applied to a whole city (*The Plague*¹⁰⁷, *Escape from L.A.*), a building (*The Towering Inferno*, *Die Hard*), or a house (*Amityville*, *Fear*). In Camus' novel *The Plague*, the walls of a colonial town close up for an unknown duration. The inhabitants find themselves captive of their own city. The narrator describes from the inside this closed, impenetrable city, withdrawn into itself. The idea of the enclosed city is linked to decline and death. In *Escape from L.A.*, Los Angeles inhabitants are also trapped in their own city. The idea of the enclosed city is linked here to a return to barbarian times and the law of the jungle.

In *The Towering Inferno*, the tower, which represents a certain residential ideal for the elite, becomes a trap for its population. In George Romero's *Land of the Dead*¹⁰⁸, the residents are stuck in the tower which was supposed to protect them from the zombies. In *Die Hard*¹⁰⁹, an ultra-protected building is taken as an hostage by a group of terrorists who use the hypertrophied security devices against the occupants. Once they took

⁹² Jenji Kohan, 2005.

⁹³ Todd Haynes, 1995.

⁹⁴ Michael Watkins, 1999.

⁹⁵ John Carpenter, 1975.

⁹⁶ J.G. Ballard, 2001.

⁹⁷ J.G. Ballard, 1998.

⁹⁸ Peter Weir, 1988.

⁹⁹ Paul Grimault, *Le Roi et l'Oiseau* (*The King and the Mockingbird*), 1980.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Fleisher, 1973.

¹⁰¹ John Carpenter, 1981.

¹⁰² Neal Stephenson, 1992.

¹⁰³ T.C. Boyle, 1995.

¹⁰⁴ Josh Schwartz, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Pierre Morel, *Banlieue 13*, 2004

¹⁰⁶ Jenji Kohan, 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, (*La Peste*), 1947

¹⁰⁸ George A. Romero, *Land of the Dead*, 2005.

¹⁰⁹ John McTiernan, 1998.

possession of the tower, they defend it against tanks and missile launchers, as if it was a medieval fortress.

The same narrative pattern is used, at the scale of the house, in the films *Amityville*, *Scream*, *Halloween* or *Fear*¹¹⁰. The story always features a luxurious, comfortable and peaceful house, expression of the suburban American ideal, which is transformed into ambush. The main character finds himself captive of his own walls, his dream of a protective house turning into a nightmare. And in the case he would stick too much to his house and refuse to leave it, then it becomes his torture room. The homeowner becomes the victim of his own dream.

In the televised series *Weeds*, a gated community becomes a trap for a group of dealers who had settled there. As the agent of the DEA explains :

Gated communities can provide a perfect cover for drug operation – insulation from the outside world – but they can also provide the ideal environment for a well executed butt. Gates keep people out, but they can also keep people in.¹¹¹

At the end of *The Tortilla Curtain*, the inhabitants of the gated community are the victims of the total protection which they built themselves during the whole novel. A fire starts, and they are imprisoned by the walls that were supposed to protect them, having not built any safety escape. They are asphyxiated like an animal in his own hole.

In the context of widespread insecurity described in *Parable of the Sower*, the gated communities have become prisons for their residents, who hardly ever venture outside, and if so only in group and armed. However, these prisons also represent the last places where a semblance of civilization remains.



Illustration 12 : Luchino Visconti, *Death in Venice*, *Morte a Venezia*, 1971, based on Thomas Mann's novel.

¹¹⁰ James Foley, 1996.

¹¹¹ 5th episode of the season 2.

3.2 Danger came from the inside

A low crime-rate, doctor, she told him amiably, is a sure sign of social deprivation.

James Graham Ballard, *High-Rise*¹¹²

The image of the *huis-clos* inevitably comes to mind when one thinks about gated communities even if, in reality, their residents have the freedom to go in and out as they wish. The idea of *huis-clos* is often associated with scenarios of degeneration. Summarized to the recurrent storyline, this scenario can be stated as follows : in an ideal community, cracks gradually appear, that will reveal an atrocious reality. This narrative pattern has been used since the film *Invitation to Hell* (1984)¹¹³, the first fiction explicitly set in a gated community. It will be frequently reused, notably by J.G. Ballard¹¹⁴. However Ballard had used it before, in a different context, as in his novel *High Rise*¹¹⁵, which takes place in an elite residential tower, before to set the same scenario in gated communities in an almost obsessional way (he wrote four novels based onto the same underlying scheme). Generally speaking, several *huis-clos* scenarios that were located in residential towers during the 1970s (*The Towering Inferno*, *High Rise*, *Shivers...*) had been relocated to gated communities since the 1980s-1990s (*Invitation to Hell*, *Running Wild*, *The Sect...*). The gated community replaces the condominium in the collective representations of the elite's *huis-clos*.

The pattern of the peaceful, ideal neighborhood which degenerates remains almost unchanged from *The Stepford Wives* to *Desperate housewives*, *Invitation to Hell*, *The Truman Show*, *The Sect*, *Weeds*, *Safe*, or the episode « Arcadia » of the TV series *X Files*. A model housewife is often the starting point of the whole trouble, whether she deals marijuana¹¹⁶, or slowly sinks in an unidentified form of madness¹¹⁷, or steals a child and assassinates his mother¹¹⁸, or mutates into a robot¹¹⁹, or leads her family to hell (literally)¹²⁰. The neighborhood may also shelter an inhuman reality TV experience¹²¹, a

¹¹² J.G. Ballard, *High-Rise*, Flamingo, London, 2003, p. 108.

¹¹³ Wes Craven, 1984.

¹¹⁴ *Running Wild* (1988), *Cocaine Nights* (1996), *Super Cannes* (2000) and *Millenium People* (2003).

¹¹⁵ 1975.

¹¹⁶ In *Weeds*.

¹¹⁷ In *Safe*.

¹¹⁸ In *Desperate housewives*.

¹¹⁹ In *The Stepford Wives*.

¹²⁰ In *Invitation to Hell*.

¹²¹ In *The Truman Show*.

sect¹²², or a tibetan creature living under the lawns, feeding itself with the residents when they do not comply to the rules and regulations edicted by the homeowner association¹²³.

All these films express a doubt about the model of the suburban American dream, and its desire of perfection pushed off limits. Gated communities from which every form of deviance is evacuated appear as the perfect place to set up a scene where weird and bizarre are the least expected. It's a place where residents worry more about protecting themselves from the outside than from the inside, which turns out against them.

The first risk for the residents is the boredom generated by too much perfection, which is often the cause of severe neuroses. It is one of the topics of the TV series *Weeds*, set in the imaginary gated community of Agrestic, California. The credits show series of similar homes, inhabited by similar people, as if they are clones.

In *Safe*¹²⁴, Todd Haynes examines boredom as such. The film shows the rise of a climate of anguish in the life of Carol White, a housewife who lives in a too pacified environment. Everything seems perfect behing the gate of her magnificent residence of the San Fernando Valley. But she becomes gradually allergic to her lifeless, tedious and alienating universe. Todd Haynes shows how the environment becomes claustrophobic. The feeling of suffocation becomes physical, unbearable. « What is that ? Where am I ? Who are you ? Are you allergic to the 20th century ? »

Boredom leads the heroin to withdraw into herself, in a form of violence turned against herself. In Ballard's novels, the same cause has an opposite consequence : boredom leads the residents to destruct each other. In *High Rise*, the return to the most cruel tribality is caused by the perfection of the residential tower, described as smooth, standardized, anonymous and peaceful, with an homogeneous population : « By the usual financial and educational yardstick they were probably closer to each other than the members of any conceivable social mix, with the same tastes and attitudes, fads and style [...] »¹²⁵

Ballard's novel *Running Wild*¹²⁶ (arguably his best about gated communities) expresses the same idea with a maximum impact. *Super-Cannes* uses the same principle. The action takes place in Eden-Olympia, a high-tech business park complex in the south of France, with elegant houses, artificial lakes, swimming pools, and its own police force. This secured paradise is reserved for an elite of senior executive, accountants, researchers, doctors, financial and business leaders. Paul Sinclair, a new resident, wants to understand why, in this context, the young doctor David Greenwood could become an uncontrollable psychopath and kill seven senior executives ? Is it « the obsession with the invisible intruder in the fortress – the other self [...] »¹²⁷ ? Is it the loss of any conscience in this immoral paradise, since « the moral order is engineered into their lives along with the speed limits and the security systems »¹²⁸. Is it the trouble, the

¹²² In *The Sect*.

¹²³ Michael Watkins, « Arcadia », *X Files*, 13th episode of the 6th season, 1999.

¹²⁴ Todd Haynes, *Safe*, 1995.

¹²⁵ J.G. Ballard, *High-Rise*, Flamingo, London, 2003, p. 5.

¹²⁶ J.G. Ballard, *Running Wild*, 1988.

¹²⁷ J.G. Ballard, *Super-Cannes*, Flamingo, London, 2001, p. 257.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

atrophy of the mind associate to a deep mental deterioration ? Is it the fact in the illusion of living in a gated community ?

The residents of Eden Olympia are linked only by interest, the community is simulated : « The notion of the community as a voluntary association of enlightened citizens has died for ever. ». Each one of them is just alone : « suffocatingly humane we've become, dedicated to moderation and the middle way. The suburbanization of the soul has overrun our planet like the plague. »¹²⁹. Eden Olympia compensates for the flaws of this unsuitable paradise. The contexte of a secured, ideal community becomes the privileged ground for a manipulative person, decided to save men from mediocrity by giving them back their primal predatory role and the cruelty they had lost. «The ultimate gated community is a human being with a closed mind. »¹³⁰

Manipulation in a *huis-clos* is also the theme of *The Truman Show*¹³¹, which underlines, in a very clever manner, the oddness inherent to the real city of Seaside¹³², exacerbation of the ideal american suburb. Seaside embodies the too perfect, therefore suspect city, in which all elements combine harmoniously, where any outburst seems impossible. Conceived out of a global design process, Seaside looks more like a film set than a place for life. It is therefore judicious to use it, in the film, as the set for a TV show in which the hero is the only one not to know he is filmed all the time.

The Truman Show also recalls the scenario of the televised series *The Prisoner*¹³³, in which a secret agent finds himself imprisoned, after his resignation, in a theme park-like « village ». The outdated jolly atmosphere hides a delirious surveillance system. Escape is impossible, every person is named after his number, and it impossible to tell who are the prisoners and who are the guards.



Illustration 13 : Patrick McGoohan, George Markstein, *The Prisoner*, 1967.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹³¹ Peter Weir, 1998.

¹³² The town was designed by the « neotraditionalist » architects Andres Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk.

¹³³ Patrick McGoohan, George Markstein, 1967.

3.3 Voluntary prisoners

Rem Koolhaas conceived a opposite alternative of the classic scenario « trapped behind closed doors » in his project *Exodus or the voluntary prisoners of architecture*¹³⁴. Having analyzed the Berlin wall « as a spectacle and an architectural concept », he decides to « “reverse its values”, in an almost Nitzchean manner » : Exodus residents voluntarily choose to live behind walls, in the center of London, locked up in a theme park-like complex. « What could appear negative in Berlin could imagine it positively in London. A dramatic, painful situation could be turned into an artificial paradise, the opposite of a prison. »¹³⁵

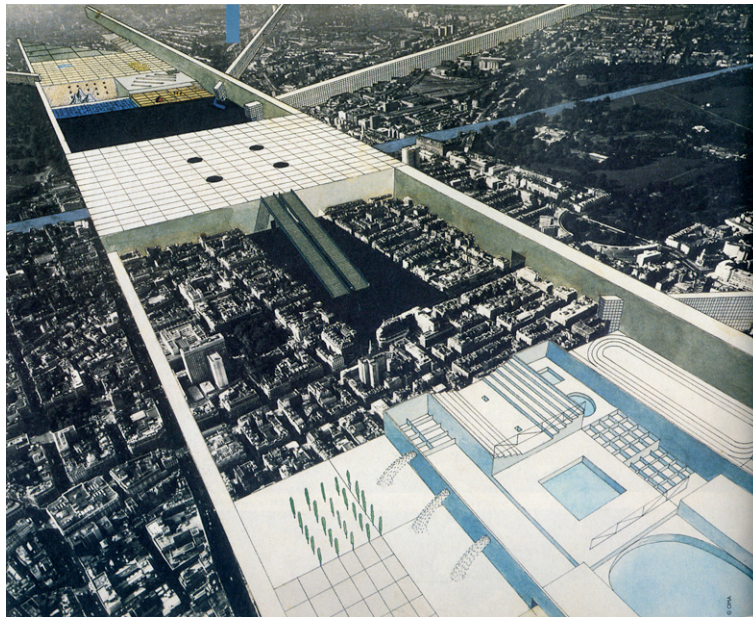


Illustration 14 : Rem Koolhaas, *Exodus or the voluntary prisoners of architecture*, 1972.

3.4 Metropolis

Finally, there is the « *Metropolis* » scenario, in which the poor and the rich (or the honest and the criminals) live in physically separated sections of the city. In Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*¹³⁶, as well as in Paul Grimault's *The King and the Mockingbird*¹³⁷, the workers

¹³⁴ Architectural Association, Londres, 1972.

¹³⁵ Rem Koolhaas, interviewed in *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, nov. 2005.

¹³⁶ Fritz Lang, *Metropolis*, 1927.

neighborhoods are located in the basement of megalomaniac vertical cities. In Richard Fleisher's *Soylent Green*, New York has reached a population of 40 millions in year 2022. Normal people huddle together in slums, while the affluent live in modern condominium towers, enclosed with moats and protected by numerous guards. They are physically cut from the territory as well as from the social realities. In *13th District*¹³⁸, Paris poorest suburbs have been walled as a safety measure and (as in *Escape from New York* and *Escape from L.A.*), return to tribality.

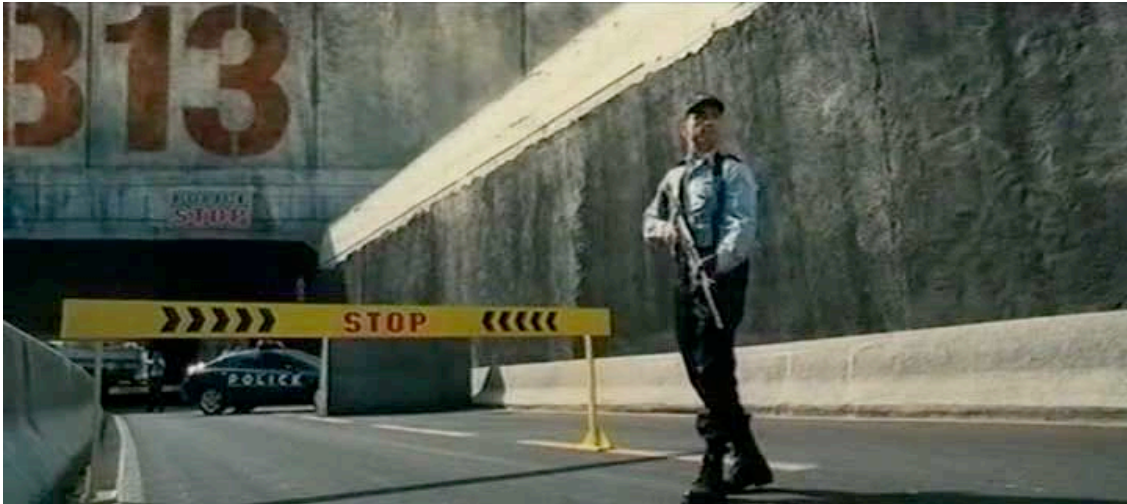


Illustration 15 : Pierre Morel, *13th District (Banlieue 13)*, 2004.

Territorial separation is also the theme of the two televised series set in gated communities, *The O.C.* and *Weeds*. *The O.C.* shows a teenager from a poor neighborhood¹³⁹ confronted with the social environment of a very wealthy gated community in Newport Beach (Orange County), where he was adopted by a family¹⁴⁰. Because of his origin, he is rejected by the rest of the community. The series shows a small world, a self centered community, a « gilded bubble » in which everybody knows each other. All the teenagers go to the same high school, all the parents go to the same charity galas. The underlying idea is the progressive debilitation of the characters in this socially limited environment.

¹³⁷ Paul Grimault, *Le Roi et l'oiseau (The King and the Mockingbird)*, 1980.

¹³⁸ Pierre Morel, *Banlieue 13*, 2004.

¹³⁹ Chino, San Bernardino county, Californie.

¹⁴⁰ The argument recalls another TV series, *Diff'rent Strokes* (Jeff Harris and Bernie Kukoff, 1978-1986), in which a wealthy family adopts two African American children.



Illustration 16 : Josh Schwartz, *The O.C.*, 2003. The social context is symbolized by the gate, which appears in the credits.

In *Weeds*, the difference between the interior and the outside is emphasized. Inside the community live affluent rich White people, while the outside is mainly represented by Black people living in a ghetto. As in the *O.C.*, the intrigue lies in the confrontation of these two worlds. A third population creates a link between the first two : Hispanic people enter the community to work as servants, maids or deliverymen.

The territorial division is pushed at its height in Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash*. He describes the megalopolis of Los Angeles in a near future, as an addition of residential enclaves and « franchise ghettos » : truly independent areas, with their own laws, emitting passports for their residents (required to go from an enclave to the other), visas for visitors, and secured by private militias. Every person is positioned on the territory according to the socioprofessional category he belongs to.

All these scenarios belong to the genre of dystopia and describe worlds in which happiness and peace are reserved for an elite. The class divisions are amplified. The gated community, initially envisaged as a means to preserve the safety of its residents, becomes a locked area, remote from the society, experienced as an aggression by the poor. By locking up in a fortress, the elite declares an indirect (and sometimes involuntary) war to the remainder of the population. In *Land of the Dead*, the rich people live in a skyscraper city (Fiddler's Green), while the poor stay in the surrounding streets, and the zombies are pushed back outside the protected territory. One of the protagonists, banned from the tower, seeks for a revenge and lets the zombies encircle and threaten the town. Romero shows the vulnerability of a locked up elite, and expresses the idea that the problems one rejects always tend to reappear.

One can understand these fictions, extrapolated from real social facts, as moralistic tales. The division of society between rich and poor, the overprotection of one class against the other, the creation of fortresses of intimacy, would expose their inhabitants to be more vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

The fictions we described in this paper seldom resemble the real gated communities ; usually the life in a closed neighbourhood is much more trivial. Yet it does not stop the authors from inventing extraordinary or improbable scenarios.

Whether utopian or dystopian, these fictions deform present trends and extrapolate existing situations. They describe the other side of the picture, a fictitious world, where the enclosed neighbourhoods are cut from the rest of the society, where social divisions are rigidly established in the territory. They use the memory of ancient violence, still present in legends, myths, traditions and literature, to illustrate the desire for an absolute safety.

Does this mean that these fictions are « unrealistic » ? Their role is different. Interviewed about his film *Escape from L.A.*, Carpenter explained that he used science fiction to give an interpretation of reality. According to him, the United States tend to become a fascist state, and most of the inhabitants tend to give up individual freedom for the search of order. His film describes precisely this situation.

Fiction proceeds by shifting reality, and is thus used to relativize and describe what we are easily aware of in reality. It generates a futurology of the territory by exaggerating existing models. The first fictions that showed gated communities precede the works of the « pioneer » researchers on the same subject by about ten years, and also announce their research topics.

Conversely, if the concept of gated community is so succesful with the public, it is because it is based on pre-written scenarios, it embodies in the real world old and « efficient » narrative patterns, which we are willing to believe. What the idea of gated community evokes is as important, if not more, as what they actually are.

This strong relation between gated communities and fiction has an influence on the people who choose to live in such environments, and on the researchers and other outsiders observing the phenomenon. Real estate developers are aware that selling a gated community means selling an environment deeply rooted in fiction. Living in a gated community is to inhabit a story – or, rather, several stories. Gated communities embody narrative patterns into reality. They are fiction-derived environments : built metaphors.

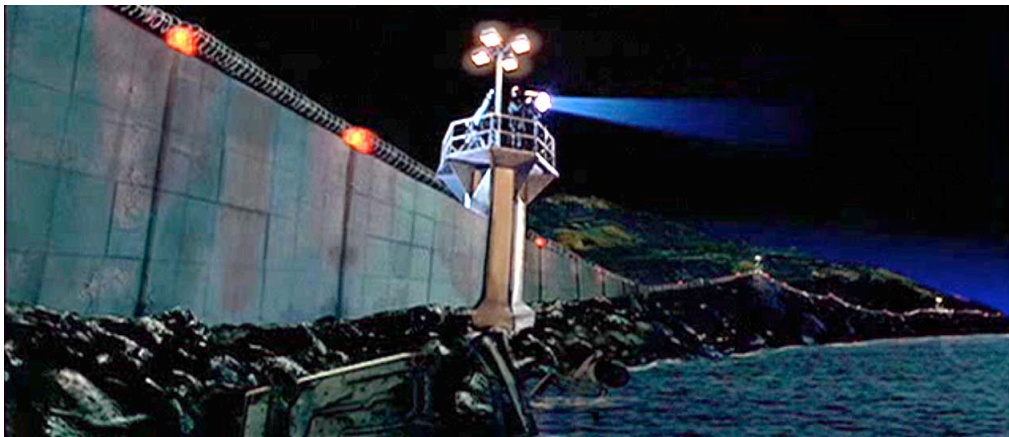


Illustration 17 : John Carpenter, *Escape from L.A.*, 1996.