**URBAN ASSEMBLAGE: THE CITY AS ARCHITECTURE, MEDIA, AI AND BIG DATA.**

- **Paper / Proposal Title:**

  Understanding Postmetropolis in the Latest Virtual City: Urban Analysis of Night City in Cyberpunk 2077

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- **Abstract (300 words):**

  The virtual environment and cyberspace are becoming an important part of the urban landscape. Night City is the virtual environment of the video game Cyberpunk 2077 released in September 2020. It’s complexity, integrity and reflections of reality prove the competence of a digital city to provide comprehensive, sustainable and immersive urban experience. Night City continues the aesthetic style of the futuristic LA in the 1982 film *Blade Runner*; and its cyberpunk-style urban model is rooted in the intricate urban sprawl described by the Los Angeles School of Urbanism as the feature of the 1990s LA and the irresistible global urban future. This paper conducts comparative urban analysis of Night City with the history, reality and science-fictional imagination of Los Angeles. By providing this demo case study, the author proposes equitable attention and effort in urban studies to be paid to the urban qualities in the virtual world.

  The paper is organized around Edward Soja’s ‘six discourses of postmetropolis’: *Flexcity*, *Cosmopolis*, *Exopolis*, *Metropolarities*, *Carceral Archipelagos* and *Simcities*. 
These six terms outline the postmodern urban characteristics revealed in Los Angeles, and the prediction of future metropolis by the LA School of Urbanism. Cyberpunk 2077 compresses the Flexcity’s international industrial structure and flexible socio-economic organization into the self-contained Night City, and produces a postmodern pastiche of the global cultural landscapes contained in a Cosmopolis. The vertical layering of communities and architectural styles in Night City is a revelation of the Metropolaities—new social hierarchies and the problematic social metaphor of ‘height’ in urban space. And the city’s horizontal layout with diverse districts depicts the Exopolis’s autonomous sub-cities within the urban entirety. While Night City also contains gated communities as Carceral Archipelagos and the hyperreal lifestyle of Simcities, the virtual gaming environment itself is a ‘carceral island’ with absolute boundary, and a ‘simcity’ that relies on hyperreality and cybernetic technology. Therefore, Night City is also a simulation of the gaming experience, and a reproduction of such experience within the game environment.

By simulating global and urban characteristics and reproducing them in smaller urban scales, Night City dissolve the traditional definitions of city. And by depicting a cybernetic world within a cybernetic game, Cyberpunk 2077 blurs the boundary between reality and simulation of reality, actual and virtual experience. Through these analyses, this paper presents the value of Night City as a realistic urban environment for personal experience and for academic studies. It also provokes further thoughts about the integration of the virtual environment into urban life.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Yulin Li is a MPhil student in the University of Cambridge conducting Architecture and Urban Studies. She has an interdisciplinary background: she studied World Culture and Literature and Product Design as double majors in Tsinghua University; and has participated in architectural research and practice in Tsinghua Tongheng Planning and Design Institute.

Her current research focus on the digital design methods, virtual spatial experience, and the impact of digital technology on real urban life. Her broader interest are the varied, untraditional architectural forms, spatial experiences, urban relationships and social systems. She tries to see the capacity and potential of mass media, digital devices and other methods to produce new understanding of space, promote spatial justice, and attract attention to underrepresented regions and communities.

Her recent studies look at the VR heritage preservation of the Digital Yuanmingyuan Project, the virtual space in video games, the internet cafes and the gaming community. Her field practice in China includes preservation and renovation of historical Hutongs in
Beijing; curation of heritage exhibition in Wudian; documentation of the cultural sceneries of the Mosuo maternal society. Her paper “Bridgeman Girls School and the ‘Westernizing’ Chinese Society” is included into the Academic Annual Journal of the 17th Academic Annual Conference of History of Modern Architecture in China. She also worked as conference organizer and interpreter for ICOMOS conferences held in Beijing; and has devoted to social works related to architecture and community preservation.