

Neoliberal Utopias and Spatial Transformation in 2010s Science Fiction Cinema

PREMIS Seminar

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Arken, Helikon (A202)

Pablo Gómez-Muñoz is Assistant Professor of English and Film at the University of Zaragoza (Spain). His book *Science Fiction Cinema in the Twenty-First Century: Transnational Futures, Cosmopolitan Concerns* was published by Routledge in 2023. He has also written about films such as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Upside Down*, *In Time*, *Elysium*, and *The Hunt* (2020).



This talk explores the interest of science fiction films from the 2010s in projecting futures governed by low-cost logics. More specifically, my presentation focuses on the spatial dimension of these narratives. These films scrutinize the contemporary neoliberal trend towards valuing low prices rather than quality, durability, eco-friendliness, or fair working conditions. Examples of this trend include: *Okja* (Bong 2017), *Downsizing* (Payne 2017), and *Sorry to Bother You* (Riley 2018). Drawing on the work of David Bosshart and Michael Carolan on low-cost economic models, my presentation highlights the centrality of precarity, spatial and bodily transformation, utopian branding, and transnational networks in the low-cost futures that these and other films imagine. This talk aims to show that sf films about low-cost futures tend to imagine societies in which economic demands and opportunities depend on re-zoning and re-bordering processes that reshape spaces. I try to make sense of these narrative elements through Neil Smith and David Harvey's theories of uneven geographical development. I use the film *Downsizing* to provide specific examples of the transformation of geographies (and bodies) in contemporary sf narratives.

Downsizing uses the speculative power of science fiction to imagine geographies that trouble the deceptive fantasies upon which low-cost economic models are built. This film imagines a world in which humans may undergo a medical shrinking procedure that allows them to reduce their environmental footprint drastically and to maximize their savings, gaining access to a higher quality of life. The film creates a new geographical and transportation model in which downsized humans relocate to mini-regions designed for their size. As Rob Kitchin and James Kneale observe, science fiction constructs "spatial metaphors" that provide "a foil for thinking about present-day geographies, their construction, reproduction and contingency" (2002: 9). Through close readings of *Downsizing*'s use of cinematic spaces, I explore the ways in which the speculative spaces of the film mirror the transnational network of uneven relations that low-cost logics tend to develop.

WELCOME - the seminar is open to all!

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