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Urban Memory in Future Cities: Cinematic Interpretations of Heritage and Identity

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Abstract

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The character of urban landscapes is shaped by the layers of history, memory, and cultural identity that cities possess. Contemporary cinema often reinterprets these layers, presenting visions of cities where heritage and collective memory are shaped by technological and environmental changes. This paper examines how movies set in the future reconfigure urban heritage and identity, and what these worlds reveal about our contemporary concerns with urban development and cultural continuity. Through the analysis of *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) and *The Kitchen* (2023), the paper explains how architecture in those movies shows the disappearance or transformation of cultural landscapes and urban heritage. Cinematic futures often illustrate the contemporary anxieties about urban development, spatial inequality, and the collapse of authentic urban identity. Through the examples and analyses provided, this paper highlights that cinematic universes offer critical assessments of cultural heritage preservation and the cultural continuity of cities, demonstrating how architectural and urban discourses change within urban spaces.

Keywords: Urban Heritage; Cinematic Cities; Urban Memory; Futuristic Cinema; Urban Identity.

1. Introduction

1.1 Cities, Memory, and Identity

Cities are shaped by different elements across physical, collective, and cultural aspects. Buildings, streets, and infrastructures are the ones that come to mind at first, but memories, experiences, and identities also connect them. Urban environments are the formation of all these aspects, bearing traces of historical events and cultural practices. Because of this, cities function as spaces where collective memory and cultural identity are continuously formed and experienced. The relationship between people and cities is enriched by architectural heritage, public spaces, monuments, and everyday urban activities. This unique spatial dialectic proves that an identity-of-place can be evaluated through a cohesive conceptual framework that accounts for historical, material, and geographic overlaps (Brode-Roger, 2026).

Identity in the urban system is intimately connected to the relationship between memory and space. A city is shaped by its architectural character, historical layers, cultural practices, and social interactions, which together form its distinct identity. Historical urban environments often create a sense of continuity between past and present by preserving cultural and spatial traces over time. As discussed by Kevin Lynch (1960), people form mental and emotional connections with cities through spatial elements such as landmarks, paths, districts, and edges, which contribute to the overall image and identity of urban environments. Therefore, urban heritage becomes an organic part of the social and cultural identity of communities.

Urban identity and collective memory are not fixed or permanent. Changes in cities are constant, driven by political, economic, technological, and social processes. Rapid urbanization, redevelopment projects, privatization, and globalization are some of the forces that transform urban environments, potentially weakening historical continuity and cultural belonging. Recent studies in the field of urban studies suggest that transformations like spatial fragmentation, displacement, and the loss of authentic urban character negatively affect social cohesion and cultural continuity within cities, disrupting the delicate resilience of urban social-ecological-technological systems (Sharifi, 2023). As technological developments expand and cities become more heavily monitored and standardized, the organic memory and identity of these spaces face severe degradation.

For this reason, discussions about urban memory and identity are becoming increasingly important within architecture, urban planning, and cultural studies. Understanding how urban environments preserve, transform, or erase memory can provide crucial insight into the relationship between people, heritage, and space. To contextualize this evolution, it helps

to look at architecture-city dynamics in the mirror of science fiction, moving beyond a standard literature review to investigate structural transformations (Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018; Ahmadi et al., 2024). Within the cinematic representation of future cities, the urban memory and identity of communities are often shown as fragmented, artificial, or highly unstable under conditions of rapid urban transformation. These screen depictions directly show the relevance of real-life conditions to the subversion of urban memory.

1.2 Contemporary Urban Transformation

Modern cities are always altering in response to economic, technological, political, and social factors. The continuous transformation of the cityscape has emerged as a defining feature of the modern era, particularly during periods of intense globalization, accelerated urbanization, and technological expansion. Large-scale redevelopment, infrastructure investment, digital city systems, and privatization are altering cities and changing how people experience them. As often as not, these physical overhauls are accompanied and exacerbated by an emphasis on economic development, modernization, and urban efficiency, occasionally resulting in negative social and cultural consequences. Urban upheaval tends to alter historical and social identity in urban regions, heavily impacting collective memory, localized identity, and cultural continuity. Gentrification and macro-level redevelopments remain among the most fiercely discussed topics in current urban discourse, necessitating tools for re-measuring gentrification to capture socio-spatial displacement accurately (Bunten et al., 2023).

Urban redevelopment projects are often geared towards improving property values and garnering external investment. This single-minded focus can drive out local communities and expunge valuable historical urban areas. As older neighborhoods get redeveloped, local identity and social connections may weaken or vanish altogether. Current literature within urban studies points out that modern urban policies routinely prioritize economic competition and technological expansion, even if it comes at the expense of cultural continuity and social inclusion (Bunten et al., 2023). In this light, urban transformation is not merely a physical modification but a shift that deeply affects community identification and how people perceive themselves through contact with their everyday environments.

On the other hand, modern technology has played an increasingly major role in shaping urban spaces. Smart city technologies, digital infrastructures, surveillance systems, and data-driven urban management change the way cities operate and the way urban spaces are regulated. While these systems may bring both economic and spatial efficiency, they also drive trends toward standardization and commodification. This alignment points directly to the rise of digital surveillance capitalism and its structural impact on contemporary cities regarding data governance, democracy, and localized activism (Makanadar, 2024). Hence, contemporary cities are now increasingly tied to electronic surveillance, technological control, and commercialization, challenging the foundational ethics of smart cities and modern urban science (Kitchin, 2016). These circumstances can result in homogenized environments in which genuine urban character and local identity decay. Technological urbanisms can engender new levels of social inequality and spatial fragmentation if they are not carefully tempered by social and cultural concerns (Sharifi, 2023).

Environmental forces and disparities in housing further amplify modern urban anxieties. Overcrowding, rising housing costs, climate-related risks, and unequal access to urban resources plague a wide range of global cities. Underprivileged communities suffer the most from these dynamics, experiencing the acute effects of spatial exclusion and precarity. This can be understood within broader global phenomena, such as protracted displacement and housing systems in intermediary cities (Te Lintelo et al., 2023). This reality is frequently channeled into artistic creations including cinema where science-fiction-inflected cityscapes exaggerate contemporary issues on a grand scale to critique modern inequality and systemic control. Cinematic representations of the city function as direct extensions of contemporary anxieties concerning displacement, fragmented heritage erasure, and identity crises.

As cities continue to change at an ever-accelerating pace, issues of memory, belonging, and cultural continuity become more pressing in architectural and urban studies. The analysis of how urban change affects collective identity and heritage presents a vital framework for looking at cinematic depictions of future cities, where these fears are usually rendered as fragmented, artificial, and highly controlled urban landscapes.

1.3 Cinema as Urban Representation

Cinema has always been an effective tool for reflecting social conditions and cultural anxieties. Urban surroundings in film narratives tend to become highly expressive sites by which identity, power, inequality, belonging, and memory are conveyed. As such, cinematic cities can be examined at visual, social, and spatial levels. Speculative and science-fiction stories frequently project current cultural and systemic conditions into imagined future settings, functioning as mirrors of our own contemporary anxieties. This dynamic facilitates cinematic urbanism, helping researchers decode and understand complex cities through film (Haas, 2024).

Cinematic urbanism research shows that cities shown in movies are tied to larger conversations about architecture, urban development, and social change. Cinematic domains frequently depict alienation, technological dominance, social disintegration, and environmental collapse. As Giuliana Bruno (2002) explains, cinema and architecture are closely related, influencing not only how people experience space emotionally, but also defining their visual experience across the two disciplines. Similarly, science-fiction cities often mirror our current fears and expectations about urban development, technological progress, and social change (Abbott, 2016). Architecture and urban form in these futuristic cinematic spaces are more than symbolic backdrops; they represent structural real-world conditions and dictate how power, ideology, and control are visually structured (Kiessel & Stubbs, 2023).

Dystopian films emphasize themes of instability, class differences, and the loss of self. These futures often project dense megacities, fragmented communities, intrusive surveillance networks, ecological ruination, and tightly controlled urban landscapes. Through these representations, futuristic cinema criticizes current urban systems and exposes apprehensions regarding the possible implications of accelerated urbanization, privatization, and technological urbanism. These future

cities are characterized as depersonalized, erased, or remade in ways associated with fears of losing a genuine urban presence, which is often represented through the lens of urban heritage and collective memory.

In this respect, cinematic city images have become significant insofar as they are useful for evaluating how modern societies perceive the trajectory of urban life. The future cities found on the screen are no longer purely imaginary; they are part of an ongoing conversation about urban transformation, inequality, memory, and identification. Hence, the intersection of cinema and the city offer an analytical mechanism to critically assess how architecture and urban space bear the fingerprints of broader cultural and social issues.

1.4 Research Gap

Research in cinematic urbanism, dystopian futures, and speculative cinema has expanded significantly over the past few years. Earlier studies frequently explored sci-fi film representations through the visual aesthetics of futuristic cities, technological dystopias, environmental collapse, and social inequalities. In the same way, urban studies and architectural research frequently interrogate the links between urban identity, collective memory, and the continuity of culture in contemporary cities. This is visible in recent efforts reviewing frameworks for identifying the memory of the city within a historical urban landscape (Mansour et al., 2025). Furthermore, it relates to broad bibliometric overviews tracing cultural identity, heritage, and imagined geographies (Shreya et al., 2026). Nevertheless, little comparative research explicitly centers on the representations of the transformation of urban heritage, collective memory, and identity via architecture and urban space in futuristic cinematic environments.

Many discussions around futuristic cinematic themes deal with technology, visual atmosphere, and dystopian narratives, rather than exploring urban memory and its specific spatial transformation. Moreover, many analyses explore individual films independently of each other rather than comparing distinct cinematic futures and their respective approaches to heritage and identity. Such findings suggest that the interlocking dimensions of urban transformation, memory, identity, and cinematic space remain comparatively unexplored in comparative film and urban studies research.

The current urban issues in question are significant because they are not only about physical transformation but also about the dismantling of cultural continuity and belonging. In areas characterized by fast-paced urban transformation, the question of how future cities might impact identity, heritage, and memory has become increasingly salient. It is thus imperative that cinematic representations of future cities be analyzed to show how present-day anxieties regarding urban development and cultural continuity are imagined and spatially represented.

To bridge this gap, the present study compares *Blade Runner 2049* and *The Kitchen* in terms of their urban heritage, collective memory, identity, and spatial transformation. The paper aims to fill the existing space around cinematic urbanism through its analytical lens, focusing on architecture and urban representation to make a critical contribution to current urban anxieties and debates alike.

1.5 Aim, Research Questions, and Scope

Hence, with this paper, we aim to study how futuristic cinema recasts urban heritage, collective memory, and identity via cinematic representations of future cities. Our examination emphasizes architecture and urban space in speculative film systems in relation to social fragmentation, technological control, inequality, and the transformation of cultural continuity. By examining cinematic urban landscapes, the work investigates the way that futuristic films address today's concerns with urban development and identity.

In this study, we concentrate on two movies, *Blade Runner 2049* and *The Kitchen*, with their competing depictions of the future city. *Blade Runner 2049* is set in an urban context that is technologically advanced yet largely a sterile, artificial one, where the past and authentic memory are almost entirely erased. *The Kitchen*, by contrast, presents a fractured and marginalized urban environment that maintains collective identity and belonging through times of social instability and exclusion. The comparison made between these two films makes it possible to contrast different representations of urban transformation and identity. The research addresses the study via three key questions:

1. How is urban heritage represented, erased, or transformed within futuristic cinematic environments?
2. What architectural and spatial elements reflect identity transformation and instability in future cities?
3. What do these cinematic futures reveal about contemporary concerns related to urban development, inequality, and cultural continuity?

It is a qualitative comparative study with an emphasis on visual and spatial analysis. The study concerns the actual cinematic representation of architecture, urban form, spatial arrangement, and social settings as opposed to formal film production or audience reception metrics. Through this lens, the paper seeks to push forward discussions around cinematic urbanism, urban memory, and the interrelationship between architecture, identity, and speculative futures.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Methodology

The study uses a qualitative comparative format to explore how futuristic cinema embodies urban heritage, collective memory, and identity through architectural design and urban space. In contrast to technical filmmaking studies, this work emphasizes the visual and spatial nature of cinematic contexts and how they intersect with current urban issues. The qualitative procedure is apt as the research concerns interpretation, symbolic meaning, and spatial representation rather than numeric and statistical information.

Based on the visual and spatial analysis of cinematic urban environments, the research evaluates architectural form, urban density, spatial organization, social atmosphere, and representations of memory and identity. The study uses selected scenes and urban settings to inspect these dimensions. In this light, cities depicted in the movies are looked at not just as fictional backgrounds but as active reflections of social and cultural anxieties regarding urban transformation.

Consequently, the analysis focuses on urban spaces as communicators of fragmentation, technological control, exclusion, belonging, and cultural continuity.

In this context, cinematic analysis can benefit from studying liquid modernity, simulation, and the cinematic construction of cities, which tracks how physical reality softens into digital layouts (Yolcu, 2026). To systematically evaluate the spatial and thematic transformations in both films, this study adopts a qualitative comparative approach. The step-by-step structure of this research design is mapped out in (Figure 1.), which illustrates the relationship between our theoretical parameters and the final comparative framework. Moreover, a comparative study structure facilitates systematic analysis of similarities and differences among selected films. Through a comparison of two distinct depictions of future cities, the project seeks to shed light on cinematic urban space within the transforming dynamics of heritage, identity, and urban transformation. Using this approach, the paper connects directly to discussions in urban studies, architecture, and cinematic urbanism to analyse how future-oriented cinema sees contemporary urban problems.

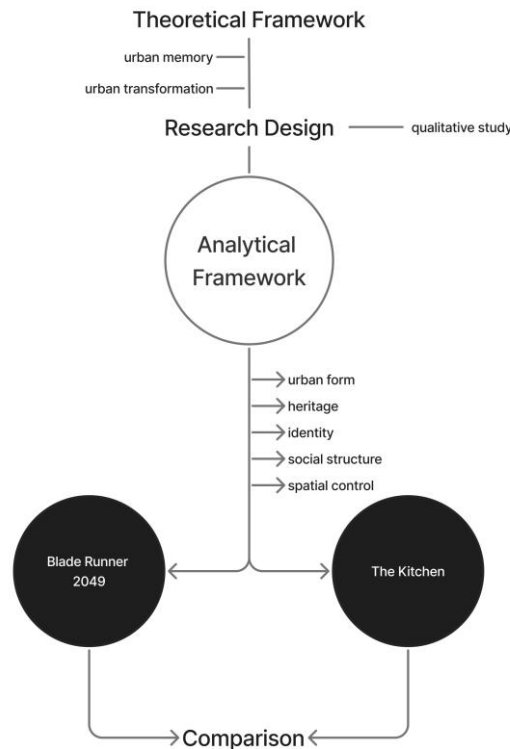


Figure 1. Methodological framework for comparative cinematic urban analysis (Developed by the Author).

2.2 Case Study Selection

Blade Runner 2049 and The Kitchen are chosen as comparative case studies. These films were selected because they both illustrate future urban landscapes characterized by inequality, instability, dominant technological systems, and spatial transformation. They also reflect competing understandings of urban identity, memory, and cultural continuity, lending themselves cleanly to comparative analysis.

Blade Runner 2049 features a highly constructed, technologically controlled urban landscape that is artificially structured, under constant surveillance, and marked by environmental degradation. This landscape functions as an awful, yet awe-full sublime dystopia that emphasizes systemic oppression through grand architectural scale (Butt, 2025). The city depicted in the movie projects a future where we have lost historical continuity and the authenticity of urban identity altogether. Architecture and urban form are used to signal alienation, instability, and the hegemony of technological systems in daily life. Therefore, the movie exemplifies city transformation, memory loss, and identity disintegration.

The Kitchen, however, showcases an alienated and socially marginalized urban space constructed on exclusion, inequality, and housing instability. Unlike Blade Runner 2049, its emphasis is far stronger on solidarity and a sense of community within bare, uprooted spaces. The tension between social exclusion and cultural continuity in this environment renders the film highly relevant from the perspective of urban memory and belonging.

A comparison of these two films enables one to consider competing projections of future urban reality through common themes of identity, heritage, inequality, and transformation. Both are dystopian pictures presenting very different models of memory, spatial control, community representation, and urban living. This contrast supports the research framework and demonstrates that different cinematic futures reflect various strands of contemporary urban anxiety.

2.3 Analysis Criteria

The films are analysed against a suite of spatial and thematic comparative criteria concerning urban transformation, heritage, and identity. The discussion focuses on the visual mediation of social circumstances and social relationships between people and space in cinematic urban environments. The qualitative comparative structure requires a systematic tracking of how physical landscapes mirror socio-political changes. The specific analytical dimensions selected for this study are outlined in Table 1, which categorizes the indicators used to evaluate urban transformation. Architectural

form, spatial atmosphere, and representations of memory and belonging are compared to highlight commonalities and dissimilarities between the chosen films.

Table 1. The criteria used in the analysis of the case studies.

Criteria	Focus of Analysis
Urban form	Density, spatial organisation, architectural atmosphere
Heritage	Continuity, erasure, fragmentation
Identity	Collective or artificial identity
Social structure	Inclusion, exclusion, marginalisation
Spatial control	Technological or social control systems

Urban form is reflected in the city's visual structure and organization, including density, scale, atmosphere, and architectural character. Heritage is analysed in terms of the persistence, disappearance, or fragmentation of historical and cultural continuity in urban areas. This spatial understanding directly interacts with the concept of heritage futures, which shows how modern choices shape what is preserved for coming generations (Harrison et al., 2016). Identity and memory are analysed through the lens of social relationships, belonging, and the representation of collective or artificial experiences. Furthermore, social structure and spatial control are assessed using topics including surveillance, exclusion, inequality, and marginalization. By examining these criteria, this study explores how cinematic future cities work as representations of contemporary urban concerns.

3. Results

3.1 Blade Runner 2049

3.1.1 Urban Form and Spatial Atmosphere

In *Blade Runner 2049*, the urban environment is characterized by a future city that is highly concentrated and technologically advanced, defined by mega-structures, high-rise development, and industrialized landscapes. This architectural configuration can be studied through a heterotopian spatial analysis, revealing how alternative spaces of exclusion and containment operate within the film (Demirhan Kiriş & İnceoglu, 2025). The city features harsh atmospheric conditions, artificial lighting, colossal advertisements, and an almost complete lack of natural environments. These spatial features lead to an urban environment that is overpopulated yet emotionally distant. The film's architecture serves not just as a setting, but as an image of alienation, instability, and social disunity.

The movie often depicts massive cityscapes where human scale is entirely lost. Streets seem overcrowded, visually polluted, and managed by technocratic structures, whereas public space is entirely stripped of genuine social interaction and inclusion. This spatial arrangement is deeply tied to corporate imaginaries and post-capitalist futures, showing how commercial entities completely monopolize the built environment (Taşkale, 2020). Elements such as neon lighting, digital advertisements, and industrial landscapes create a sense that urban life is unnatural and disconnected. The extreme verticality and segregation of the urban environment in *Blade Runner 2049* are summarized in the spatial hierarchy presented in Figure 2, which highlights the sharp divide between corporate enclaves and the disenfranchised lower levels. Future-oriented cinema environments often sensationalize the built environment to echo social paranoia. *Blade Runner 2049* takes the form of a city rife with concerns about technological urbanism, environmental decline, and the loss of genuine urban identity.

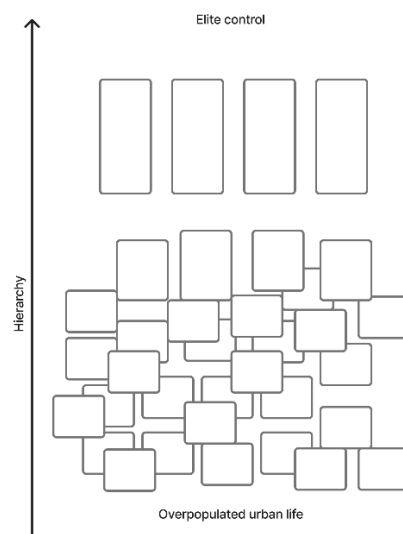


Figure 2. The hierarchical system in *Blade Runner 2049* (Developed by the Author).

The city is based on a rigid social structure and profound inequality. Wealth and technological supremacy are concentrated in small corporate enclaves, while ordinary urban spaces are depicted as overcrowded and dilapidated. It has led to a

fractured urban form of existence in which the city no longer operates as a shared social environment but as a managed, uneven system. As a result, the film's visual environment reinforces its dystopian themes, presenting urban space as shattered, manufactured, and detached from historical continuity

3.1.2 Heritage, Memory, Identity, and Spatial Control

Central to *Blade Runner 2049* is the decline of collective memory and the dissolution of meaningful city identity. History and culture are virtually invisible in the city, and the urban environment is constructed mainly through technological and commercial means. This condition directly complicates the process of archiving memory in *Blade Runner 2049*, illustrating the unstable role that personal and historical records play in defining posthuman identity (Ghosh, 2025). Architecture is disconnected from organic memory and belonging, evoking a future of unstable and fractured collective identity. When urban space stops providing continuity or emotional connection, it exacerbates isolation and prompts severe identity crises.

The film also investigates the ways in which technological systems shape identity and social organization through surveillance, corporate power, and artificial memory. Personal experience and memory are depicted as manufactured and controlled, casting doubt onto what exactly constitutes identity: real lived experience or artificial design. This reflects a post cyberpunk dystopian cityscape dominated by emotional artificial intelligence, requiring a spatio-cognitive analysis of how posthuman entities perceive themselves within closed networks (Elyamany, 2022). Corporate infrastructure pervades the city, reproducing social stratification in technologically mediated places through unequal means and spatial conditions. This dynamic explicitly reshapes subjectivity and cinematic space, dictating how characters move through and experience the built environment (Gelly & Roche, 2022). Public space serves less as an arena of shared living and more as a managed space produced through consumerism and surveillance. By means of these representations, the film engages contemporary concerns about the domination of technology, privatization, inequality, and the decline of human-centric urban environments.

3.2 The Kitchen

3.2.1 Fragmented Urban Environment

The Kitchen presents a future of urbanism marked by social inequality, housing instability, and spatial fragmentation. Unlike the high-tech urban void and heavily artificial construction seen in *Blade Runner 2049*, the urban environment in *The Kitchen* feels more realistic and socially grounded. The film focuses on communities that are economically and politically marginalized and entirely cut off from the rest of the city. Urban space means overcrowded housing, deteriorating infrastructure, and limited access to resources, reflecting current real-world issues with housing crises and displacement in post-industrial cities (Bunten et al., 2023).

The fractured urban fabric depicted by the film creates a sense of precariousness and fragility. Public places do not seem well-kept or integrated with larger urban systems, and the architectural context stands as an indicator of social exclusion rather than technological dominance. This spatial arrangement mirrors present-day urban inequality and displacement debates, where gentrification and economic stress re-stretch the limits of vulnerable communities (Bunten et al., 2023). This environment can be analyzed through themes of social exclusion, marginalization, and homelessness, illustrating how modern structural adjustments push vulnerable populations out of stable ecosystems (Lukovic-Radakovic & Copic, 2026). The movie offers a vision of a future city determined not by advanced technological utopias, but by systemic inequalities and marginalization. In contrast to the highly controlled atmosphere of the previous film, the social dynamics of *The Kitchen* rely on dense community interdependence, as illustrated in Figure 3, which maps the informal social pathways within the residential cluster. In this dismembered landscape, *The Kitchen*'s urban framework remains a vestige of casual social contact and collective survival.

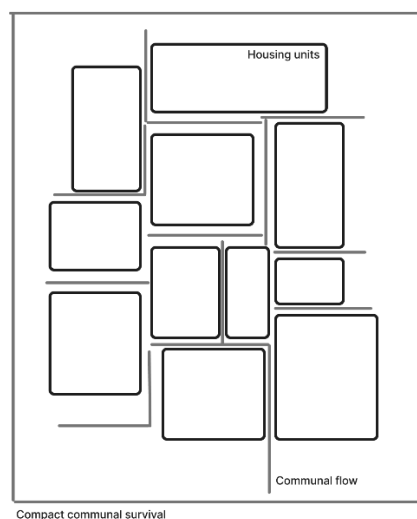


Figure 3. Communal housing system in *The Kitchen* (Developed by the Author).

In the new city of *Blade Runner 2049*, spatial relations feel emotionally hollow. *The Kitchen* shows a world that preserves continuity: community relations survive under unstable urban conditions instead of dissolving completely. This serves as an important juxtaposition of technological alienation against collective survival in future cinematic cities.

3.2.2 Collective Identity, Belonging, and Marginalization

The Kitchen embodies the enduring identity of a group experiencing systemic exclusion, making the fragile state of community its primary theme. This represents a distinct method of representing identity through cinema, where the camera documents organic, localized survival strategies rather than highly stylized techno-paranoia (Haq & Shoesmith, 2022). Although the city is fragmented and uncaring, community ties and shared experiences within the housing estate remain evident throughout the film. Community memory and unity continue to manifest around daily interactions, communal spaces, and shared struggles. For this reason, identity in the film is still socially constructed rather than artificially designed by technological means.

Fears of marginalization and exclusion, along with the internal tensions they breed, echo the anxieties present in modern metropolitan spaces. Residents are socially and spatially isolated from the rest of the city, representing a wider discourse on issues of migration and social exclusion (Markou, 2026). Rapid urban transformation and redevelopment can easily destroy social continuity and increase spatial patterns of inequality (Sharifi, 2023). This disruption directly challenges the social significance of the preservation of historic buildings, as top-down developments frequently prioritize market profitability over localized historical continuity (Ma, 2025).

The Kitchen depicts these questions through urban spaces where communities struggle to maintain a sense of acceptance in unstable times. Though in *Blade Runner 2049* identity is depicted as fragmented and artificial, *The Kitchen* conceives identity as collective and community based. While the future city represented in the film remains dystopian, shared memories, localized sociality, and resistance give a sense of continuity to the narrative. This contrasting structure underlines the necessity for a shared experience that centers urban memory during radical times of metamorphosis.

4. Discussion

We show that cinematic representations of future cities are important spatial narratives reflecting current urban transformations. Instead of presenting neutral fictional environments, *Blade Runner 2049* and *The Kitchen* frame their worlds as alternatives to real-life urban conditions through which contemporary discourses on memory, identity, and urban inequality can be scrutinized. Cinematic cities serve as analytical frameworks for understanding how urban transformation reorganizes social and spatial experiences.

The comparative analysis highlights two distinct models for urban transformation. *Blade Runner 2049* is characterized by an extremely controlled, vertical, and artificially produced urban form in which spatial arrangements are dictated by technological and corporate apparatuses. By contrast, *The Kitchen* features a highly fractured urban form built on material deprivation and social marginalization. Both films are dystopian, but they represent different spatial logics: one defined by a techno-culture of overproduction, and the other by infrastructural and social neglect.

A central difference arises in the presentation of urban heritage. In *Blade Runner 2049*, heritage is either obliterated or supplanted by simulated and commercialized settings, representing a clean break with history. In contrast, *The Kitchen* reveals a partial but lingering form of heritage sustained by lived experience and social customs, entirely separate from formal architectural conservation. This implies that urban memory might be systematically erased by top-down forces, yet can still be sustained via informal, socially embedded forms.

Similar mechanisms create identity in different ways. In *Blade Runner 2049*, identity is constructed as artificial and external, formed and imposed by technological systems and controlled environments. Identity in *The Kitchen* remains communal, formed through shared social relations in the face of marginality. This comparison brings to light two different paths of urban subject formation under conditions of rapid change.

The sociology of social structure also corroborates this discord. *Blade Runner 2049* portrays a stratified urban society with a high socio-economic hierarchy along with stark spatial segregation. Conversely, inequality in *The Kitchen* is manifested through the marginalization and exclusion of communities pushed to the edge of urban systems. Both films deal with inequality, but the former is controlled by large corporations, while the latter results from systemic neglect.

Another major point of comparison is spatial control. In *Blade Runner 2049*, the streets and urban spaces are highly institutionalized with a thick layer of corporate and technological control for surveillance and restriction. Spatial control is formally weak in *The Kitchen* but is replaced by social relationships where everyday lives are maintained via social interactions in community-based spaces. The structural and social divergence between the two cinematic environments highlights how different spatial logics can mirror contemporary urban anxieties. The fundamental differences between the two case studies are synthesized in Table 2.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of the case studies.

Criteria	<i>Blade Runner 2049</i>	<i>The Kitchen</i>
Urban form	Dense, vertical, artificial	Fragmented, informal
Heritage	Erased	Fragmented but present
Identity	Artificial, constructed	Collective, community-based
Social structure	Highly stratified	Marginalized communities
Spatial control	Neglected but socially active	Neglected but socially active

The comparison indicates that while both films express the anxieties of contemporary city life, they manifest them within vastly different spatial and social dimensions. One focuses on technological oppression and the erosion of urban continuity; the other foregrounds insecurity, alienation, and the viability of communal life under conditions of exclusion.

Collectively, they show that future cinematic cities are spatial manifestations of how real-world urban transformation is changing at this moment in time.

5. Conclusions

The current research, based on a comparative study of *Blade Runner 2049* and *The Kitchen*, probes how futuristic cinematic representations frame urban heritage, collective memory, identity, and spatial transformation. By centering architecture and urban space, this work investigates the ways cinematic futures mirror and re-envision current urban circumstances rather than simply imagining detached, impossible worlds.

The findings suggest that the two films deliver very different yet complementary visions of urban transformation. *Blade Runner 2049* establishes a city where identity is artificial and controlled, heritage is erased, and memory is synthetically produced. In stark contrast, *The Kitchen* depicts a fractured, socially alienated urban metropolis where heritage endures in communal practices, even as social and spatial exclusion seeps into the very marrow of space. Both examples illustrate different visions of urban dystopia, yet both are constructed through contemporary systems of inequality, displacement, and spatial restructuring.

This study demonstrates that urban memory and identity are not simply lost, but are continually reconstructed to meet different spatial, social, and technological conditions. While one cinematic future highlight technological overproduction and surveillance, the other warns of infrastructural neglect and social fragmentation. Between them, they demonstrate how urban transformation is not confined to the physical properties of cities but drastically impacts the cultural and symbolic structures that define lived urban experiences.

To this end, the study contributes to cinematic urbanism by demonstrating that science fiction and dystopian cinema deserve to be understood as active critiques of contemporary urban anxieties. This contrast highlights the value of reviewing multiple cinematic examples in tandem, as varying representations expose a plurality of ways in which urban identity and memory are constructed. Looking beyond these representations, we notice what current urban transformations are doing to the material and immaterial parts of cities: our spaces of belonging, identity, and cultural continuity.

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Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable.

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Umay Çınar: Conceptualisation; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Software; Supervision; Validation; Visualisation; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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