

Architecture in Space

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Abstract

For the avid science fiction reader/viewer, the relationship between fiction and reality is an abundantly spectacular prospect to study and understand. In what distinct ways could Science Fiction influence contemporary architectural design? Looking at some examples of Films & Film theory - We may begin to understand this relationship of science fiction and contemporary architecture a bit better through the ones mentioned below – METROPOLIS: This film is a striking representation of modernity – Art Deco & Gothic-inspired Futurism. 2001 – A SPACE ODYSSEY: The architecture of the future depicted in this film is in two phases. The first depicts highly futuristic, suborbital structures. The second part, is where the future seems more uncertain and unachievable utopian. BLADE RUNNER: this movie shares its sense of ‘urban gigantism’ and geometrical form with Metropolis. WALL-E: Rampant consumerism and environmental neglect have turned the Earth into a massive, garbage-strewn wasteland. To understand the origin and result of Contemporary Architecture and its relationship with the genre of science fiction, a survey was conducted by a few researchers, amongst a small group of twenty-five people. The assumption that can be made from this study is that films have been and will continue to be able to predict the reality of our future to a certain degree. This degree therefore depends on several factors that go beyond and include the current rate of globalization, technological advancements, societal constructs, environmental concerns and the all-governing laws of physics. As architects, our job now, is to find ways in which this knowledge can inform, inspire and invent architectural design and practices in ways that will benefit people.

Keywords –

Science fiction, Contemporary architectural design, 2001-A Space Odyssey, Art deco, gothic inspired futurism, urban dystopia

For the avid science fiction reader/viewer, the relationship between fiction and reality is an abundantly spectacular prospect to study and understand.

What would life look like about 100 years from now?

This is a question that has plagued the minds of laymen and theorists alike. No one seems exempt from the vast, impending sense of oblivion that accompanies the said question. Obviously, nobody in the known universe has the power to assess and gauge the future, yet. Is it going to be just as the movies predict it will be? Or something completely unknown?

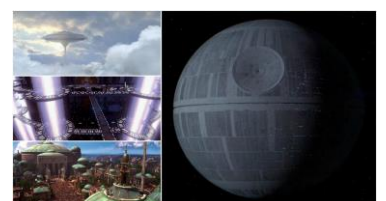
In what distinct ways could Science Fiction influence contemporary architectural design?

To answer these questions, one must first begin to understand that in the past, science fiction was commonly used to prophesize fantastical renditions of what the artists, theorists and philosophers of that age thought to be predictions for our (present) future – which we now know from experience, has been greatly exaggerated in some cases and in a few more, have been quiet on the mark. A good case in point would be Arthur C. Clarke’s futuristic saga, 2001: A Space Odyssey. Written in the year



Source:

<http://www.theverge.com/2017/9/24/16345612/syd-mead-art-design-book-blade-runner>



Source:

<http://www.archdaily.com?786751?the-architecture-of-star-wars-7-ionic-structures>

1968 and featuring a movie adaptation by the director Stanley Kubrick, this was one of the first of its kind to detail the intricacies of space flight and what travel to space might seem like. While we now know that some parts of the story were a bit too advanced for their time – for example, the luxurious space travel as featured in the lobby of the Galactic Hilton Hotel, there are also several other instances that mirror real life events – like the Apollo 11 moon landing that happened the following year in 1969.

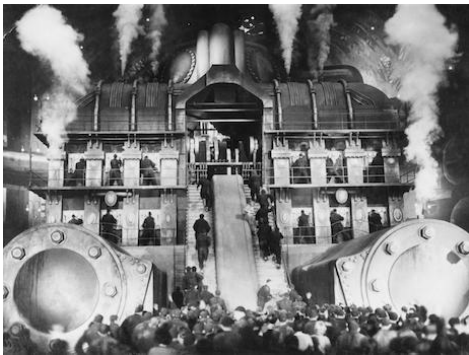


Fig. 1: The Machine

Source:

<https://www.facebook.com/Metropolis-Movie-5359105132054>

Therefore, to understand the effect of science fiction films on current architectural trends and the future, it is important to comprehend the three ways in which the influence of these films has materialized in real-life architecture and vice versa. These include:

1. What is predicted that can/will happen
2. What is predicted that cannot/will not happen
3. What is not predicted that can/will happen

the son of the city's mastermind falls in love with a working-class prophet who predicts the coming of a savior to mediate their differences.

The most poignant aspect of the film lies in its representation of the idea of a class divide, of which the upper classes are oblivious of. A majority of them do not even know of the existence of the working-class-machine beneath, that runs the city. The place is also overrun by towering skyscrapers that don't touch the ground, suspended bridges and highways that float over the cityscape and a flourishing economy that overshadows the robust, broken-down machine that lies underneath them.

2001 – A SPACE ODYSSEY

Arthur C. Clarke's representation of the future is a philosophical and phantasmagorical drama, laden with heavy metaphor and meaning. The music and the brilliantly designed sets only add to the aspect of suspense and thrill, right from the menacing HAL 9000 computer (that can almost be compared to modern day Artificial Intelligence) to the highly ominous scene of the bedroom at the end of the Universe. Set in the year 2001, the film was released lesser than a year before the first moon landing by American astronauts. This proved to the public (at the time) that space travel of the kind depicted in the movie was, in fact, not such a distant reality after all. The architecture of the future depicted in this film is in two phases. The first depicts highly futuristic, suborbital structures in the orbit of the Earth and the Moon, as well as a settlement on the Moon itself. While we now know from experience that this part of the film was still well ahead of its time, it does actually seem to be the most realistic



Fig. 3: The Room at the End of the Universe

Source: <https://kottke.org/tag/Paul%20Kember>



Fig. 4: The Hilton Space Station Lobby

Source:

https://www.reddit.com/r/RetroFuturism/comments/as2o4i/2001_a_space_odyssey_hilton_space_station_lobby/

Looking at some examples of Films & Film theory -

We may begin to understand this relationship of science fiction and contemporary architecture a bit better through the ones mentioned below -

METROPOLIS:

This film is a striking representation of modernity – Art Deco & Gothic-inspired Futurism.

Fritz Lang's depiction of the ruling classes shows them inhabiting towering, futuristic buildings that reflect his vision of a technologically dependent and oppressive society living literally above its working class. In a futuristic city that is sharply divided between the working class and the city planners,

representation of the near future. The second part, however, where the astronaut starts to begin his journey from human to 'star-child', is where the future seems more uncertain and unachievable utopian.

BLADE RUNNER

Described as a 'cyberpunk vision' of the future, Ridley Scott hypothesizes in his film that by the year 2019, Los Angeles will have been populated mainly by the ethnic underclass due to the mass colonization of utopian "off-world" planets by the elite upper class. The city is depicted as a sprawling industrial zone with huge mega-structures that impose over and dominate the skyline of the city. In fact, this movie shares its sense of 'urban gigantism' and geometrical form with Metropolis. Apart from this, it also stands as a classic example of an urban dystopia overtaken by a heavily industrialized area, crowded with people and a constant downpour. Apart from ground traffic, there are personally maneuvered vehicles called 'spinners' soaring through the sky. The only significant difference in the vision of this film from that of Metropolis is that the upper classes have left the Earth to move on to 'off-world colonies', leaving behind a rotting planet for the working classes to fester in.

WALL-E

Andre Stanton's masterpiece is a profound and seemingly realistic depiction of what the 29th century would look like. Rampant consumerism and environmental neglect have turned the Earth into a massive, garbage-strewn wasteland. The story, thus, follows two droids that go on an adventure to try and replenish the earth by planting the very last living seedling. Filled with hope and

determination, the end of this movie sees a meteoric rise in the living conditions of the planet, once these seedlings start to germinate. However, film theorists have also argued that with the existing technologies and systems in place for waste management, it is highly impossible for the entire area of the Earth to have been converted into a massive dump. It is also widely argued that the only possible way a dystopian future like this could become reality would be if a single entity/organization chooses to gain benefit from a trash-covered Earth.

To understand the origin and result of Contemporary Architecture and its relationship with the genre of science fiction, a survey was conducted by a few researchers, amongst a small group of twenty-five people (age group: 21-60 --years).

The 'general assumption' of the public is the key in understanding the relationship between science fiction and real-life architecture. After all, the public becomes the end users of the ideas propagated through film as well as the architecture that is derived from it. The following are the results of the survey:

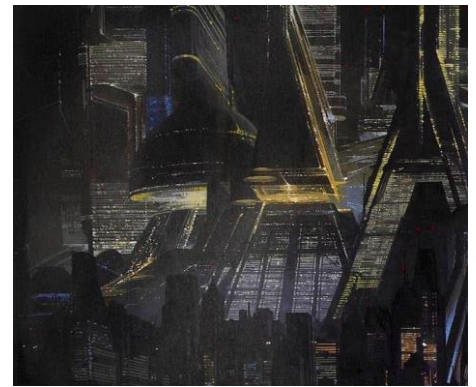


Fig. 5: Concept Designer Syd Mead's Visualisation of the Superstructures
Source: <https://www.wired.com/2010/04/blade-runner-concept-art/>

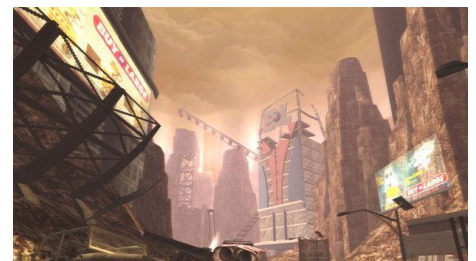


Fig. 9: Skyscrapers of Waste on an Abandoned Earth
Source: <https://www.archdaily.com/7719874/lessons-pixar-films-can-teach-us-about-architecture>

The above results further verify that the most widely accepted scenario of the future is based on plot lines from the previously studied films. The result also shows that the most widely accepted scenario is very similar to that of the movie Metropolis, which happens to be one of the oldest and most revered films to date. It presents a likely possibility that the dystopia of the Earth might be limited to the Earth itself. Furthermore, the participants were also questioned on their predictions for the prevalent architectural styles of the future. The results to this question showed that the deconstructive, brutalist, postmodern and vernacular styles were the most widely accepted predictions for the future of real-life architecture. All of these styles, therefore, paint a rather weary-yet-dynamic landscape for the future of architecture. Finally, on being questioned about the opinion of whether science films can successfully depict the future, the results showed that the majority did believe it (scoring an average of 6.2 on a scale of one to ten; one being least likely to believe & ten being most likely to believe).

The assumption that can be made from this study is that films have been and will continue to be able to predict the reality of our future to a certain degree. This degree therefore depends on several factors that go beyond and include the current rate of globalization, technological advancements, societal constructs, environmental concerns and the all-governing laws of physics.

As architects, our job now, is to find ways in which this knowledge can inform, inspire and invent architectural design and practices in ways that will benefit people.

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