

## Representation of the Architectural Future

Our interest in seeing characters in literature and film succeed and fail through difficult to impossible situations is nothing new. Humanities vanity is a well-documented phenomenon. From Homer's Iliad to the pouting lips of Liv Tyler in Armageddon, we love to see the endurance of the human spirit, our ability to attain the unattainable, and to experience the bitter taste of failure. The stories teach lessons, give hope, and help the audience identify with a character's difficulties. Choosing to set a story in the future is a successful approach to telling a tale. It separates the audience from current events but does not have to ignore them. In fact, drawing on past and present occurrences brings believability to the tale; wrapping the audience in a blanket of reality insulates them from finding doubt in the story. The same must occur within the setting of the story. But what must an author or filmmaker do to convince his audience that the world they are entering is real and tangible? What is in the character of the setting that can persuade us to believe it is possible? How do we architecturally represent the future?

The appearance of habitations, towns, cities, and landscapes must conform to the storyline but must also blend into the audience mind as a plausible future, one that we can relate to but that has evolved from us separately. By examining the films *Brazil*, *A Clockwork Orange*, *Equilibrium*, and *Renaissance* in relation to their respective settings and film locations, successful representation of the architectural future can be identified. In conjunction with the film analysis, it is important to observe past and current efforts in architecture to forecast the future. Rio de Janeiro, The Olympic Stadium in Berlin, Il Palazzo dei Congressi, Brasília, the architecture of Future Systems, and the Spaceport located in New Mexico are examples of contemporary architecture that work alongside the films mentioned to create a representation of the architectural future.

*Brazil's* opening scene flies the audience through a sky full of clouds and declares in bold text that it is, "8:49 p.m. - Somewhere in the Twentieth Century". Completely misleading, the statement allows *Brazil* to repeatedly surprise the audience with its bizarre, surreal, and grotesque reality. It is a highly exaggerated

vision of the Twentieth Century, making it more a representation of a possible future than taking place in the present or past. *Brazil's* representation of the architectural future can be best described through the exploration of the location used for the exterior of Sam Lowry's apartment, Noisy-le-Grand, the extensive use of technology throughout the film, the interrogation offices and the torture chamber, and the similarities between *Brazil* and Rio de Janeiro.

The apartment complex of Palacio d'Abraxas, located in Noisy-le-Grand, a commune outside of Paris, was used as the location for the apartment of Sam Lowry. Palacio d'Abraxas, built between 1978 and 1983, was based on the fascist style and was therefore well suited in appearance to match the Orwellian storyline<sup>1</sup>. The warm colours counteract the comfort they may have been intended to provide as they create a very dark, foreboding environment, one associated with muggings and underhanded business. It also creates volumes that can be observed from many different vantage points throughout the complex.



Figure 1 – Palacio d'Abraxas

How can this be a representation of the architectural future? Rio de Janeiro, constantly associated with its beautiful, crescent shaped Copacabana beach bordered by countless high-rises, is completely dominated in terms of built environment by the favelas that cover the hillsides. In some of the densest locations, their arrangement is startlingly similar to that of the Palacio d'Abraxas complex. Structures built tightly together where units at the bottom may get very little daylight are common. However, the living conditions are very different. Some favelas have electricity and plumbing but almost none of these services are legal; nor are the favelas.

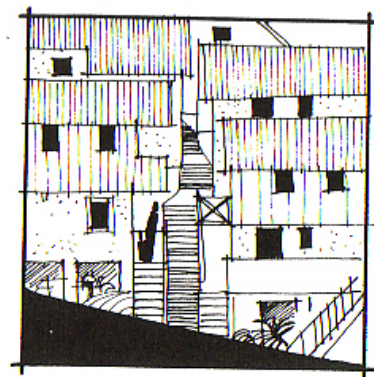


Figure 2 – Rio de Janeiro favelas

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<sup>1</sup> Viennaslide.

Drainage is often provided by gravity in open ditches while, “electricity is provided in some (favelas) by concessions granted by the local electrical company.”<sup>2</sup> Driven by poverty and class division, the continuation of the favela language in Rio and other similar cities appears to have no end<sup>3</sup>, therefore becoming the future of Rio’s architecture.

The interior of Sam’s apartment contrasts greatly in appearance to its exterior with its cold, tiled design and odd bits of technology sticking out haphazardly. The ductwork magnified video screens, automatic toasters, and overcomplicated telephones contribute to the reading of this environment as the architectural future.



Figure 3 - Sam Lowry's apartment

Though this technology presently exists, and can at times dominate our lives, it has been highlighted in the film to the point that it cannot be ignored. Sam’s Mother’s apartment has a similar ductwork growth overtaking the living spaces, as does the restaurant at the beginning of the film. It stands as a statement that, in the future, the lives of people will be so dominated by technology that we will eventually be overtaken.

After Sam’s capture by the authorities, he is taken through various interrogation spaces and is isolated within a huge cooling tower, acting as a torture chamber. The interrogation spaces were nothing more than cubicles enclosed with translucent, billowing plastic sheeting surrounded by moving silhouettes of officials beyond. The temporary character created by such flimsy construction suggests that quality of the space is not important as it is not inhabited for significant amounts of time, or that the people inhabiting the space are unimportant. It causes the audience to question their own present surroundings, perhaps the office that they spend 37.5 hours a week sitting in a fabric covered cubical; is this the direction that all offices are moving? Contrasting the interrogation areas, the torture chamber is a structure of permanence. Its size and layout dictate that the center of the space is the complete

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<sup>2</sup> Evenson, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Evenson, 24.

focus of the operation. It has been developed to work effectively as a space that can isolate a prisoner by dominating his size and limiting his escape to one very narrow path. One might imagine that at present, places that serve this function tend to be more temporary and not as assertive in their dark purpose. So this too can be seen as a 'step forward' in the design of institutions of torture.

Though described as taking place "Somewhere in the Twentieth Century", *Brazil* proves to be more a representation of the architectural future than one of present day. Similarly, Rio de Janeiro is a city of both shantytown and permanent language. As its population increases and no changes in social hierarchy are made, the favelas shall remain a permanent fixture in Rio's future.

Presenting an architectural aesthetic of cold, heartless, and mistreated spaces to match closely with the central character's conduct toward all people, Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* paints the streets of London in a violent, abhorrent light. With his gang of "droogs", Alex had the rule of the streets, raping and beating people for amusement and to assert his power. Described as taking place in the not too distant future in a Fascist England, *A Clockwork Orange* has taken modern architectural style and used it to describe what is to come. By looking at the Tavy Bridge Centre in Thamesmead South, used for Alex's apartment complex, and the Brunel University Lecture Centre, used as the Ludovico Medical Facility, it can be seen that *A Clockwork Orange* has created a very tangible, believable world that could still be considered as a possible architectural future.



Figure 4 - Thamesmead South

The Tavy Bridge Centre and the surrounding Thamesmead South area was constructed in various stages over twenty years starting in the mid 1960s. Acting as the main housing development for a larger area that would eventually include commercial and production facilities, it was once dubbed the "Town of the twenty-

first century”<sup>4</sup>. Grand in scope, the Thamesmead South, East, and Central complexes made use of the land previously occupied by the military. Though Thamesmead South is completed, it sadly remains under populated and is attached to a too small downtown core area. It has since been called an “unspeakable concrete disaster”<sup>5</sup>. Brunel University Lecture Centre speaks a similar architectural language as the Tavy Bridge Centre in terms of materials and monolithic construction, though it is better composed and remains a central hub to the University campus. But why are these archetypes consistently used in films to portray the future? In terms of style, the modern movement attempts to eliminate ornamental elements to maintain simple lines, elegant volumes, and to express structure. Yet today, most Western homes are constructed in ‘traditional’ style where ornamentation is still encouraged, materiality is warm in appearance, and oversimplification may be perceived as cheap. Therefore, it is still in the mindset of the population as a whole that the architectural future is still in a realm of simplicity and stark style, detached from the sentimental qualities of ‘traditional’ architecture.



Figure 5 – Brunel University  
Lecture Centre

The heavy-handed, fascist qualities of the two examples in the film contribute well to the proposed storyline. Their cold style reflects the heartless treatment of people throughout *A Clockwork Orange*. They are without sympathy, driven only by their functions to serve people in the most minimal way possible, by sheltering them but not necessarily comfortably. Even their size is intimidating; the housing complex through its unending repetition of living units and the Ludovico Medical Facility by its sheer volume.

*A Clockwork Orange* presents its audience with a world bent on being a cold and inhospitable place. Its representation of the architectural future reinforces this statement by depicting structures that are modern by design and foreboding by architectural language. The opposite can be said as well, that the story, set in the

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<sup>4</sup> Hidden London.

<sup>5</sup> The Worldwide Guide to Movie Locations.

near future, dictates that these buildings are the future of architecture and not the remnants of a “concrete disaster” and a University Campus.

The architectural style of Libria, the fictitious city of *Equilibrium*, owes much of its credit to the Fascist movement that occurred prior to the Second World War in Germany and Italy. Berlin’s Olympic Stadium, built for the 1936 Olympics, and Il Palazzo dei Congressi, built to commemorate the Universal Exhibition of Rome in 1942 were featured in *Equilibrium* several times. These structures were used as a tool to emphasize the passage of time and express a potential architectural future. Similar to Libria in the sense of an architectural utopia, the city of Brasília exudes modernity. Designed from the beginning as “an architect’s, rather than a planner’s, city,”<sup>6</sup> the city carries a homogenized appearance with most of the principal buildings designed by Oscar Niemeyer. The aforementioned projects were designed to display power, to celebrate art and history, to instil national pride, and above all else, to create architecture that would stand the test of time and ride into the future.

Berlin’s Olympic Stadium (Olympiastadion), designed by Werner March for the 1936 Olympics, was a central piece to the massive Olympic complex. After the Nazi Party had come to power in 1933, it was decided that the Olympics would be used as a form of propaganda for the Nation. So, it became very important that the stadium stand out as a symbol of



Figure 6 – Berlin’s Olympic Stadium

power, strength, and longevity. Faced in stone, the sweeping open air corridors evoke images of the Coliseum and other symbols of the Roman Empire. Though Rome has fallen, many of it’s finest structures still stand strong and tell the story of the most powerful, and far reaching empire that the world has ever seen. What better way to establish a nation as something eternal, be it the Third Reich or the Librian society, than to model the architecture after something that has already been standing for 2000 years?

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<sup>6</sup> Evenson, 117.

Used in the first moments of *Equilibrium* to establish the style and feel for the film, Il Palazzo dei Congressi was built to commemorate the Universal Exhibition of Rome in 1942, which was cancelled due to the Second World War. It was constructed between 1938 and 1954 and remains a shining example of Rationalist architecture with its “modern lines and classical taste”<sup>7</sup>. It is because of its clean, timeless style that makes Il Palazzo dei Congressi a perfect candidate to establish Libria as a future society. It can be compared easily to classical architecture, especially in Rome, through the choice of materials, proportions, and powerful appearance and so would stand well in a past world. However, it could easily belong in some future society, as it bears no markings of time, no ornate details of past architectural movements, and no associated iconography. It is in effect, a clean slate, able to be adopted into a future society.

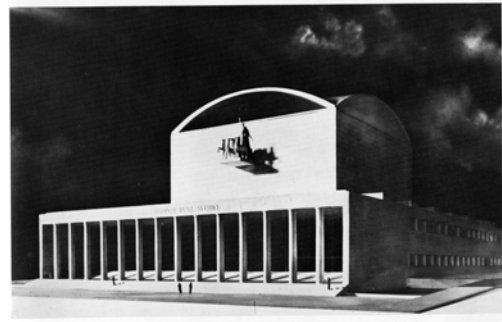


Figure 7 – Palazzo dei Congressi



Figure 8 – Palazzo dei Congressi

Brasília, a city planned by one architect and designed by another, stands as a testament to one country’s will to assert itself in the modern world by building itself a modern city. The base plan competition for Brasília was held in 1956 and was won by Brazilian architect, Lúcio Costa, while the city’s development was headed by Oscar Niemeyer, also a Brazilian. Subject to much criticism due to its hasty construction, lack of planning professionals, and general break from convention in the planning of a city, Brasília definitely does not exhibit all the qualities associated with what is considered a great city. Brasília has been described as:

an architect’s full-scale mockup – a bland and sketchy idea in need of greater detailing. If one thinks of a city as a human settlement imbued

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<sup>7</sup> Palazzo dei Congressi.

with the richness of history, with the patina of a long and varied human experience, with the physical complexity and architectural diversity resulting from a long series of adjustments, additions, and design decisions, Brasília is not yet a city at all.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 9 – The Mall - Brasília



that so many successful cities lack; the ability to morph into something new. This “unfinished masterpiece”<sup>9</sup> has the bones of a city laid and is awaiting the flesh that time and culture will bring. Sometimes the representation of the future appears in the open spaces that are left by our past mistakes.

But where Brasília fails as a city, it succeeds in creating an architectural representation of the future. The fact that it still stands incomplete, undeveloped, and undecided as a city gives it a quality



Figure 10 – The Itamaraty Palace - Brasília

A film created using live actors and computer-generated animation, *Renaissance* takes place in Paris in the year 2054. Stylistically similar to a black and white comic book, the artwork of *Renaissance* is highly sophisticated and able to distill a scene down to its primary elements. Emotion is conveyed through the characters’ facial expressions and movements, and the musical score and scene treatment create atmosphere. One of *Renaissance*’s other strengths is its ability to convince the viewer that this is the Paris of the future.

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<sup>8</sup> Evenson, 104.

<sup>9</sup> Polidori, 56.



The sense of time felt when in Paris is caused by the layers upon layers of history left visible; new areas contrasting with old, many cultures melting into the contemporary Parisian, and many additions and subtractions to buildings. Throughout the film, much of Paris was left unchanged. Many monuments still dominated the horizon as they always have and the Haussman layout remained legible. But much of the already dense Parisian cityscape had increased in density, parasitically. New constructions, usually illuminated white boxes of varying shapes and sizes, were attached to the sides and tops of existing structures, like a child holding onto its mother or a parasite attached to a host animal. Other buildings had become dynamic, being able to change shape or appearing to give birth to a new structure, or a new form of architecture. Simply by adding to an already well known city was an effective way for the designers of *Renaissance* to represent a possible architectural future.



Figure 11 - Église Sainte-Julien-le-Fauvre

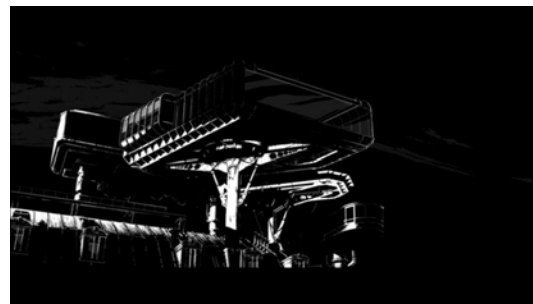


Figure 12 - Renaissance

Similar to *Renaissance's* parasitic style, the architecture of Future Systems creates structures that are able to attach to their surroundings, appearing like mechanical insects. However, the design of these structures is focussed on minimal impact to the landscape, often only attaching to the surface at three or four small points. A prime example of Future Systems strategy is Project 005 - Weekend Retreat for Miss B., designed in 1980. Appearing more symbiotic with the landscape than parasitic, Project 005 sits

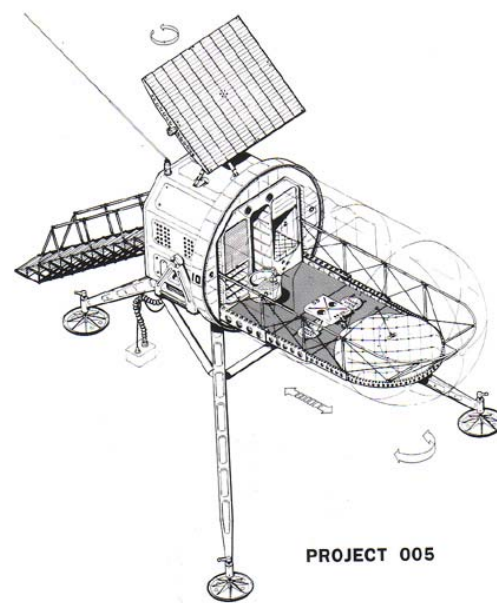


Figure 13 - Project 005 - Future Systems

lightly on the ground using a tripod. Similar to its prototype, Project 001, Project 005, “is only attached to the surrounding world by one end of its walkway and a bundle of flexible telephone, water and electricity lines”.<sup>10</sup> Its small interior space has been deeply considered as well, there are no conventional furnishings but an integrated soft seating area and an adjustable cooking station.<sup>11</sup> The main structure does not remain static either. It can rotate according to the desired view or the entire apparatus can be retracted within itself for security. The architecture of Future Systems, be it a temporary residence such as Project 005 or a large office building, remains constantly respectful to its surroundings and site. To appear to tip toe about until an appropriate settling location is found, the Future Systems approach to design is intriguing and should be considered in all design analyses. Though drawn 28 years ago, Project 005 remains a representation of the architectural future.

Located on the Southwest corner of Colorado, Chimney Rock stands as an ancient lunar observatory, designed to frame a view of the Moon that only occurs once every 18.6 years. The Chacoan Great House at Chimney Rock, constructed by the Chaco Civilization around 1076 AD, stands to frame the rising of the Moon through Chimney Rock where it appears to rise from the same location for two to three nights in a row.<sup>12</sup> It is amazing to consider that a preliterate culture was able to observe such a rare celestial event and construct a tool to record its repeated occurrence. But there is enough archaeological evidence to suggest that, “the great structures at Chimney Rock were in fact built for the express purpose of gathering as many people as possible to witness the standstill in one of the few places on earth where geology provides the necessary frame.”<sup>13</sup>

To be able to create a place, one that is still being used to this day, to observe the passing of lunar events and to bring people together from all over the world, is to create a place of timelessness. Far from being “futuristic” in design, the Chacoans



Figure 14 – Chimney Rock  
Colorado

<sup>10</sup> Pawley, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Pawley, 19.

<sup>12</sup> Horn, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Horn, 2.

have never the less created architecture for the future. As long as the moon rises and people understand the importance of the location, Chimney Rock and The Chacoan Great House will remain in use.

Not far from the centre of the Chacoan Civilization in New Mexico, a new structure whose purpose is focussed on the sky is appearing in the desert. Spaceport America, designed by Foster + Partners and SMPC Architects, is to be the first private spaceport in the world. It's chief client, Virgin Galactic, will be taking the world's first space tourists to the edge of our atmosphere and back, allowing them to experience near zero gravity for a short period of time.

Designing to inspire and excite the new client base, the shape of the building and its interior, "seek(s) to capture the drama and mystery of space flight"<sup>14</sup> while the spaceport itself is integrated into the landscape through the use of high berms and low-slung design.<sup>15</sup> This, in contrast to The Chacoan Great House, is designed to appear "futuristic" and what choice does it have? The new spaceport must function not only as a modified airport but also as a billboard. In order to attract and convince people to pay a huge sum for a few hours of zero gravity, the spaceport must be able to attract its clients by being one of the most enticing structures on the face of the planet. People must feel confident that by passing through the gates of Spaceport America, they will be enjoying the highest comforts money can buy as well as a safe journey. The design of the building in appearance is responsive to its surroundings, as a hill in the landscape though the activities that will occur on the site will not blend in so well, during every take-off and landing. Its organic form has recently become a new appealing aesthetic in architecture as well, making it contemporary in feel and will perhaps afford a longevity of style that will make this design the architecture of the future. But at present, it is difficult to say whether or not this will be the case. Due



Figure 15 - Spaceport America - New Mexico

<sup>14</sup> Foster.

<sup>15</sup> Kaufman.

to be completed sometime in 2010, Spaceport America will be the first private commercial spaceport in the world, but with several nations close at its heels, will it manage to be the most successful?

The representation of the architectural future can be done successfully in many different ways: through the adaptation of the “futuristic” design aesthetic of contemporary architecture, by creating timeless design by unifying observers in one special place, by treating site and landscape with the respect it deserves, by building on known styles and altering them to become something new, through creating the base for a new world while leaving room for it to grow, by relating to the old world but without replicating it, by breaking from the traditional and embracing something with hard edges to set new challenges, or by remaining the same, becoming the past present, and future of architecture all at the same time. It is an intriguing process, attempting to define what has yet to occur, but by analyzing film, and past and present architectural projects, patterns begin to emerge. Indications of what is to come in architecture and style become more obvious once some key elements of timelessness and change are identified. In truth, no one can say for certain what the architecture of the future will be but it can still be represented and envisioned in so many ways.

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