

DIGITAL IMAGING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

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Utopia and Designed Futures

There seems to be a number of themes emerging from the blog. Recently I have been viewing Adam Curtis's *All Watched Over by Machine of Loving Grace* with fascination and I have already been struck by the similarities between the beliefs of techno-evangelists and those of the high priests of modernism. I discussed this issue in a blog entry titled "The 'Architecture' of the Web: Digital Utopias and Dystopias"

The first episode of Curtis's documentary begins with the Ayn Rand and her philosophy of objectivism while the second episode deals with partially the ideas of the architect Buckminster-Fuller.

Modernist design and designers influenced by the ideas the Constructivists, the Futurists, the Bauhaus and De Stijl, thought they could change society with their creations. Architecture was the main expression of these claims. However, whole areas of our culture have been altered by the modernist belief that technology could produce a better and less divided society. Designers with their declaration that 'form follows function' have endeavoured to make designs seem progressive, functional and rational and less ornate, in direct opposition to the Arts and Crafts Movement and the luxury style of Art Nouveau. Architectural drawings have influenced science fiction illustration and writing, while buildings have been important backdrops to films and television programmes and are alluded to in graphic design (one thinks of Peter York's name for designers: "gridniks"). The novel *Fountainhead* (1943) by Ayn Rand, later made into a film (dir. King Vidor 1949), explores the idea of the image of the designer as a priest, social thinker and lifestyle guru. It is interesting to note that Rand's protagonist was said to be based on the 'image' of Frank Lloyd Wright. Today, the more representational computer games include architectural renderings and web and multi-media design speaks in architectural metaphors. The modernist ideas in typography and the presentation of information in grid forms are reminiscent of the International Typographical Style and usability heuristics in web design. Post World War Two and certainly after 1960, designers opposed to what they saw as the minimalism and sterility of modern designs have been referred to as post-modern. Tom Wolfe in his book *From Bauhaus to our House* (1981) criticises Le Corbusier and Gropius and Utopia and the whole concept of architect as design guru.

Further reading and Sources:

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