

# Wasn't the Future Wonderful?

UG7\_Pascal Bronner & Thomas Hillier\_ 2017/18



Image: Cathedral City, 1988. Iskander Galimov

*"No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be."*

- Isaac Asimov -

If Wikipedia is to be believed, in 1967, author T.R Hinchcliffe wrote the Pelican book *Retro-Futurism* with the intention of examining major recurrent themes in mans' many analogue predictions and prophecies of the future, from inspired fantasy to factually based notions, their cultural & scientific impact, the brilliance (or otherwise) of those ideas, and how they are now faring at the apparent dawning of the, then electronic future.

Although a recent neologism, Retrofuturism continues to portray the future, combining recent ideas of nostalgia and retro with the traditions of futurism to explore the tension between past and future, and between the alienating and empowering effects of technology. This occurs when pre-1960's futuristic visions by writers, artists and filmmakers are re-examined, refurbished and updated for the present day, offering a nostalgic, counterfactual image of what the future might have been, allowing us to rebuild the imagination and dreams of the past.

As we travel deeper into the digital age, are we loosing the ability to look at the future in this romantic way? Past visions of the future were teeming with distinct qualities and weird and wonderful worlds, worlds so far removed from the spirit of today. From Jules Verne's Novels to Jean Marc Cote's illustrations, these worlds were intrinsically linked with the technology they portrayed. They had an eccentricity that was endearing to the eye and delightful to the mind. Now we look back at them with nostalgia. In 200 years will people look back at our visions in the same enchanted way?

The Internet has concentrated our perception of what's new, but it has also given us countless ways to revisit the old. Perhaps we already know too much about the future as we have seen so much more of the past? We certainly live in a futuristic and ever-changing time, with driverless cars, Amazon Go's, androids and self-lacing Nike trainers all on the verge of being commonplace, but arguably the biggest change is the visual disappearance of technology. We can no longer see it. Technology has become so microscopic whilst hardware has become so streamlined and smooth it blends seamlessly into the world that surrounds us.

# Wasn't the Future Wonderful?

UG7\_Pascal Bronner & Thomas Hillier\_ 2017/18



Image: The Fifth Element, 1997. Luc Besson

We want to ask the question; wasn't it fun when we had steam, propellers, cables and inflatable bags? How can we express the future if we cannot express the technology that drives it? How do we draw and visualise this experience, the space and the landscape that this invisible technology will leave behind? We don't, however, want you to invent the future; we want you, like Retrofuturism, to re-imagine today with a view of the past. We want you to travel back to the 40s, 50s and 60s and imagine what could have been.

To explore this, the unit will be travelling to Bangkok in Thailand, a city both old and new that has in large parts moved slowly in terms of technological integration and augmentation, but is it a worse place for it? Almost certainly not! From age old markets to historic Grand Palaces and Buddhist Temples to food recipes passed down through the generations, this city will become the perfect test-bed for your brave new world.

## **RetroPast:**

If we want to create a better tomorrow then perhaps we should start by searching for a better today. Students will be asked to 'peel-away' the layers of yesterday and critically and creatively examine the past or 'a' past of Bangkok. You will analyse an area, building, artifact or tradition of Bangkok through the ages and understand how it has changed, why it has changed and its socio-political consequences on the city. We want you to speculate on what could have been done differently and how, which will lead to a parallel masterplan of your chosen subject. You will use this speculative reality to explore and question how and why you should construct your drawings or models, and with what tools, analogue, digital, both or neither?

## **RetroFuture:**

These speculative realities will, in some form, be taken with you to Bangkok and used alongside your field trip investigations to develop the programme and site for your main building project. Like Retrofuturism and Science Fiction we want your buildings to be propelled into a new realm that feeds on the technological advances of the future and extrapolated into the most imaginable extreme. As always your work should embody the unit's agenda of craft, speculation, experimentation, wonder and delight and, unlike Retrofuturism's dystopian neighbour, be filled with an overriding sense of joy and optimism!