Project: The Effect of Millennial Culture on Design

by

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During the twentieth century society developed a fixation on the approaching millennium resultant in a enduring vision of the future which has remained unchanged even as the "future" became present and finally past. The vision constructed by mid-twentieth century culture was made possible largely due to technological achievements resultant in new materials from which new forms were able to be produced. At the same time outer space, the new frontier was being explored by man and machine. Fervor created in these moments allowed people to consider the "impossible" as possible. The advent of these new territories created an excitement for the new world they were to create. It is important to note however that these events and discoveries take place near the Millennium. Christian mythology had long promised the moment in which the world would be purged of everything unpleasant and distasteful. It was largely expected that the Millennium would deliver this moment; that this moment in time would allow for the manifestation of the world's desires. People would work less, machines would work more. Everyday objects would do our work for us and be beautiful and streamlined at the same time. We would not be confined to the ground, but rather would be able to travel the galaxy.

What is truly striking about the mid-century vision of the future is the continued maintenance of this vision sixty years later, even though the "future" is past. In his essay The Millennium French philosopher and social theorist, Jean Baudrillard (2000) argues that the Millennium did not take place, because there was no true event (pages 31-57). As a result of this, society is unable to move forward, to progress in any meaningful way as we are still counting down to the spectacular Millennium that never happened. As such, society's vision of the future has remained unchanged since its conception. Moreover, our vision of the "future" will never change; progress will not be made until an authentic event takes place which will allow us to break free of the virtual world and its expectations we have created.

During the construction of the "future" several aesthetic themes were created and embraced by popular culture. The introduction of new materials such as plastics allowed for curvilinear forms as well as precise geometrics. Monochromatic interiors were largely embraced with sparse applications of vibrant
colors. Effusive lighting became an integral component of design as did built-in furniture formed as part of the architectural elements. In addition, “floating” elements as well as entire “floating” structures became an important aspect of this aesthetic. It is these elements that I have concerned myself with identifying through popular culture iconography. I will refer to the designs created by these elements as millennial design. In addition, we will examine Zaha Hadid’s and Ron Arad’s millennial design within the Hotel Puerta America. Moreover it is these elements that I have carefully incorporated into the architecture and design of my thesis work, a casino-resort based within the mid-century construct of the future: Project. In addition to the millennial aesthetics adopted within Project I am interested in the ultimate escapist retreat created by a structure reliant on the unattainability of the “future” which has already passed. Through contemporary culture’s continued embrace of the mid-twentieth century’s construct of the future, before and after the Millennium Baudrillard’s claim against the passing of the Millennium is reinforced.

In Anaheim, California, Disneyland created one of the early manifestations of millennial design with the 1957 Monsanto House of the Future. It was tagged as “an experimental design demonstrating structural applications of plastics” (Disneyland, 1960) (Figure 1). A walk through attraction, it was composed of four equal wings made almost entirely of plastic that “floated” above the ground.

The “floatation” was made possible through a sturdy pedestal planted deep within the ground which supported the four light, plastic wings which cantilever from the central axis. The use of plastics in construction allowed not only for the extreme cantilever but the dramatic curves and rounded off geometric forms as well. On both the interior and exterior the walls flowed into the floor with a slight curvature making an interesting new profile in architectural design. In addition, the *House of the Future* was furnished with modern freestanding furniture and a variety of built-in components, particularly in the kitchen, making a truly unique space for the “future” family (Figures 2 and 3). The “floating” structure’s use of plastics, built-in furnishings, dramatic curves and rounded off geometrics became demonstrative of the vision of the future.

![Image of interior views of the Monsanto House of the Future, Anaheim, California, 1957-1967.](image)

As a result of Western culture’s continued fascination with futurity, in 1962 Hanna-Barbera Productions created *The Jetsons*, a cartoon based in the late twenty-first century (Figure 4). The series conceived of a family living in a world of flying cars and push button technology. The world of *The Jetsons* is perhaps the most emblematic vision of millennial society for it is a place in which humans truly work less and machines work more. *The Jetsons* reinforced the curves and modified geometric forms heralded by *The House of the Future*. Furnishings balance on narrow tapering bases which would typically topple over, but do not because of the future’s technological advancements in materials and engineering, or so we are to believe (Figure 5). Curved panoramic windows circumnavigating the entire circular apartment of the Jetson family are another result of the technologies of the future notice the similarity to the glass walls of
the *Monsanto House of the Future*. The use of curvilinear forms, particularly interior walls (Figure 5), the modified geometric forms of the circular apartment, the curved panoramic windows and the furniture that practically "floats" on its thin, tapered legs reinforce the millennial design elements introduced by the *Monsanto House of the Future*.

![Figure 4](image)


![Figure 5](image)


In 1968, shortly after the *House of the Future* and *The Jetsons* were unveiled, Stanley Kubrick's film *2001: A Space Odyssey* was released. Kubrick’s film proclaims its participation with the Millennium and outer space in its title. Images of the Monolith in the first chapter of the film: *Dawn of Man* and the environment created in the second chapter of the film: *Jupiter Mission* are of primary concern in this discussion. I will later consider the impact of Kubrick’s smooth, black monolith on *Project* but for now let us focus on the space ship’s interior shown in *Jupiter Mission*. The coloring of the ship’s interior is
primarily monochromatic. The world on view is clean, pure and logical which is enforced by the extreme use of white, the purest of all colors, in the film. When color is introduced to the set it is with vibrant hues: typically reds, pinks and oranges (Figure 6).

Kubrick continues his theme of logic and enlightenment through the compartmentalization of functions within a space. Functional objects are not kept in view but rather concealed behind doors and within drawers (Figure 7). The ship’s corridors demonstrate the use of perfected geometric shapes repeated through the corridor. These “perfect” specimens of geometry are made possible by the use of technology which removed the chance of human error as well as materials, such as plastics which did not warp or disintegrate unlike wood, plaster and gypsum board. Soft effusions of light are commonplace in 2001: A Space Odyssey. Objects and technology glow and illuminate the spaces around them as steady streams of light fall from above.

Kubrick’s film is arguably the most influential set of images to inform millennial design. References to 2001: A Space Odyssey throughout popular culture abound. It is the aesthetic quality of Jupiter Mission
that is most recognizable. Monochromatic interiors with sharp bursts of color, compartmentalization of space, stark geometric shapes, the juxtaposition of fluid curves and sharp angles and effusive lighting are identified as pervasive threads in millennial design as a result of this film.

Throughout the mid-twentieth century true manifestations of millennial design were created, the *House of the Future* is an example of this. However, it is the manifestations of millennial design at the end of the century and even after the Millennium that we must now examine. The designs of Zaha Hadid and Ron Arad are of particular interest for although they do not explicitly refer to the concepts of millennial design in any of their statements, both of their design aesthetics are quite heavily invested in and indebted to the vision of the “future” developed during the mid-twentieth century, showing just how integrated these concepts are in contemporary culture.

Let us consider the *Hotel Puerta America* of Madrid, Spain opened in 2005 where both Zaha Hadid and Ron Arad were contracted along with seventeen other designers and architects to design a floor of the hotel. Hadid and Arad were individually charged with the task of creating the public spaces, such as the
elevator lobby and corridors, as well as the guest rooms on one level of the hotel. Hadid’s and Arad’s spaces both vividly employ the elements of millennial design previously laid out.

![Elevator lobby, Ron Arad, Hotel Puerta America, Madrid, Spain, 2003-2005.](Image)

Upon arriving on Arad’s floor, one is surrounded by a circular room concentrically expressed in the circular bench seating surrounding a centrally located circular cocktail table (Figure 8). This largely monochromatic space and furniture layout along with the glowing inset television screens that line the walls is reminiscent of Kubrick’s corridors, only compressed and laid on its side. Notice also the glow of light emitted by the head and base of the walls and the drooping light within the ceiling. Within the guest rooms Arad has again used perfected geometry with circular beds over which a circular indentation in the ceiling hovers (Figure 9). The bed’s structure connects to a curvilinear interior wall and while doing so creates a desk and assists in compartmentalizing the functions of the space.
Hadid's floor opens into an arctic vision of the future. The elevator lobby is a monochromatic, almost entirely white space, excepting the light beige carpet and pink light glowing from the ceiling's folds (Figure 10). Curvilinear, amoeboid forms dominate the space. These forms function as furnishings, floor, ceiling and walls, all of which undulate and melt into one another.

Within Hadid's guest's rooms the line between furniture and architectural structure is even more blurred. The guest rooms are sculptural objects (Figure 11). The shell of the space seamlessly flows into the furnishings creating a three dimensional form which assists in compartmentalizing the functions of the space, which is a prevalent theme in millennial design. Carefully placed lighting allows the space to glow while enormous unobstructed, panoramic windows afford natural lighting. Hadid's design entirely does away with the precarious supports of The Jetsons furnishings and rather allows them to "float" above the floor's surface by integrating their supports into the wall.

Arad and Hadid create spaces largely dependant on the explicit traits of millennial design such as "floating" structures, built-in furnishings, curvilinear forms, effusive lighting and monochromatic color schemes. These designers/architects concern themselves with the interaction and integration of architecture and furnishings, not only creating fluid connections but also creating compartmentalized spaces for specific functions. Both designers are truly invested in the quality and effect lighting plays in a space. In addition, Arad and Hadid push technologies, methods and materials to their limits in order to create forms based in millennial design.

It is the influence of all of the architecture and designs which helped to create and perpetuate millennial design that have affected my aesthetic decisions within my graduate work and more specifically my thesis: *Project*. In addition, it is in great part due to the fact that millennial design is, in 2007, still society's working vision of the "future" that drew me to investigate this set of constructs.

In order to discuss the interior spaces of *Project* we must first examine the basic architectural form, footprint and corresponding floor plans. The building is composed of thirty-seven inverted "Y" shaped floors sharing a central axis. The ground and second levels of *Project* are modified inverted 'Y' shapes. The voids behind the frontal wings are partially filled to allow for additional square footage. Beginning on the third level each floor rotates 1/2° to the right. In doing this I was able to create a dynamic structure providing the square footage needed for a casino-resort. The rotation also allowed me to follow the typical shape of casino-resort floor plans while creating an atypical structure. When conceiving of the structure the monolith in 2001: *A Space Odyssey* was of great aesthetic interest to me (Figure 12). The building's exterior demonstrates this as it is sheathed in reflective gray glass which I represented on the architectural form model with a burnished graphite finish (Figures 13 & 14). While investigating the three-dimensional form of *Project* I found it helpful to examine the formal sculptural elements of the work. This meant exploring the negative form created as well as the positive (Figures 15 & 16). By creating a negative form model I was able to investigate and experience the structure in an unusual way.
The study of positive and negative was vital in creating *Project* as well as the sculptural models based on the project.

**FIGURE 12**
Film Still (monolith) from Stanley Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968.

**FIGURE 13**
FIGURE 14

FIGURE 15

FIGURE 16
Minus (detail), Architectural Form Model, 2007.
An atrium is created within the central axis from which each level rotates (Figure 17). The void created by the atrium rotates just as the building does. However, it also twists in on itself as it rises up the height of the building creating a spinal effect as you view the entirety of it. Triple elevator bays attach to the inside perimeter of the atrium creating a columnar effect. The thin linear forms created by the elevator shafts help to emphasize the degree of rotation and twisting taking place within the building’s structure. The atrium walls begin at the second level as white in color as the levels ascend so does the gradient of aqua, so that as you look up the atrium gradually turns to a vibrant hue. The ground floor of the atrium is generally monochromatic using whites and grays, with silvery elevator shafts ascending to each level.

FIGURE 17
View of atrium from above, CAD drawing, 2007.
Guests and visitors of *Project* enter on the ground floor into a vertically compressed space which releases them into the spectacular thirty-seven story void which is the atrium (Figure 18). The salon and spa are placed directly to the right of the main entrance so as to be easily accessible to guests of the hotel as well as visitors (Figure 19). Also to the right are the registration area and concierge facilities. The registration area is made up of a circular room protruding into the space below the atrium and contains curvilinear furnishings as well as ceiling changes and corresponding floor material changes. To the left of the main entrance access is provided to the administrative offices. Directly back through the atrium is the casino
gaming floor along with two restaurants, one of which is a fine dining experience, as well as conference center facilities.

*Figure 19*

Project’s second level houses a large shopping arena as well as housekeeping and maintenance facilities. The remaining thirty-five above ground floors are dedicated to over 5,000 guest rooms and suites (Figure 20). These floors are comprised of three types of rooms: a typical guest room, a double bay suite and what is essentially a triple bay grand suite located at the exterior tip of each of the three wings of the
inverted 'Y' floorplan. The different types of guest rooms and suites embrace millennial design but individually focus and highlight different millennial design elements.

FIGURE 20
Typical guest floor plan, CAD drawing, 2007.

The guest room corridors lead one on a rhythmic approach to the room (Figure 21). The walls protrude into the corridor’s walkway, encroaching on the space with their angular forms while still leaving eight feet of clear pathway. In order to imply that the walls are floating the heads and feet of the walls emit a soft glowing light. Each guest room has a small niche carved out of the angular corridor wall to provide privacy for the guest’s entrance and exit of the room or suite.
The grand triple bay suites house two bedrooms, two and a half bathrooms, a dining area and living area (Figure 22). The floor plan of this suite is open and spacious, made to appear more so by the multitude of windows on the three exterior walls. Within the bedrooms linear built-in furniture provides storage and seating for the guests. Conversely the open plan dining and living spaces are outfitted with modern freestanding furniture.

The double bay suite is an open floorplan space containing only a wall and a bed in its central area (Figure 23). The curved wall acts as a traditional barrier as well as a headboard and night tables to the centrally located bed. Surrounding the bed is a sunken area surrounded by wide but shallow circularly
formed steps that also act as seating. This geometry is mimicked in the ceiling changes directly above. In order to enter this open, geometrical space one must travel through a short, vertically compressed corridor created by the interior walls of the dressing room/closet and the bathroom. The bathroom wall adjacent to the open bedroom houses the bath tub and shower and is composed almost entirely of glass. On the other side of the room, on the wall shared by the bedroom and dressing room/closet a built-in bar is housed.

FIGURE 23

The typical guest rooms contain no furnishings per se (Figures 24 and 25). All furnishings are designed to be part of the structure, creating a truly sculptural space. Curvilinear planes twist and fold up and down the walls to create seating, tables, bed and even a ceiling change. Every function of the space is
provided by its structure. The same technique is employed in the bathroom in order to provide the expected facilities as well as storage in an unexpected way.

FIGURE 24
Typical guest room floor plan, CAD drawing, 2007.

FIGURE 25
Perspective view of typical guest room, CAD drawing, 2007.
While all of the interior spaces of *Project* abide by the rules of millennial design it is the aforementioned spaces that exceptionally manifest these concepts, such as monochromatic color schemes, effusive lighting, curvilinear forms, curves and geometric forms juxtaposed within a space, and the integration and implosion of architecture and furnishings. In order to convey these ideas and forms created within the context of millennial design I created not only the drawings which correspond to the design of *Project* but also created the positive and negative architectural form models previously mentioned. At the Georgia Museum of Art I displayed these models burnished with graphite on gray pedestals. The negative model, *Minus*, is set on at nine inch high pedestal to allow the viewer to comfortably peer into the depth of the void. The positive form model, *Plus*, is set higher on a forty inch high pedestal so as to be able to view the structure from various angles. Behind these models two large banners portray various axonometric views of *Project*’s design as well as the ground floorplan. The drawings are surrounded by a medium gray tone to assist in making a total composition between the three-dimensional and two-dimensional aspects (Figure 26).

*FIGURE 26*
In conclusion, my involvement with these subjects stem from a fascination held by many, that millennial design is still considered to be futuristic and modern. Society’s continued involvement in the mid-twentieth century construct of the future only assists in confirming Baudrillard’s statement that the Millennium did not take place. If the future is no longer taking place and our existence is one of involutionary history it only makes sense that our culture’s futurist vision would remain unchanged even as the “future” becomes present and past. It is this transhistorical contemporary time that promises the stability and stagnation of this particular vision of the future. This vision must remain society’s vision of the future as there is no predictable end to the millennial countdown. Thusly, millennial design will continue to be a prevalently used set of elements and aesthetics until we are delivered into the “real” once again.
References


http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/diziago/HOTF_POT_text.html


