

Dystopian Film Clip Guide

Metropolis (Fritz Lang, 1927)

Metropolis is set in the year 2026, when the populace is divided between workers who must live in the dark underground and the rich who enjoy a futuristic city of splendor. This work is one of the earliest examples of a dystopian film. The following three scenes provide an overall glimpse of the dystopian characteristics that are present throughout this film. The first two scenes depict the drudgery of daily work on an assembly line. The third scene shows images of what the director pictures as what the world of the future will look like.

1. Opening credits (00:00-3:16)
2. Shift Change (3:17-5:40)
3. The New Tower of Babel (15:51-17:01)

Brazil (Terry Gilliam, 1985)

Brazil takes place in a futuristic world dominated by a mindless and often incompetent bureaucratic government. Sam Lowrey, a government statistician, feels beaten down by the decaying, drone-like world around him. To escape the misery of his job Sam fantasizes that he is a superhero forever rescuing a beautiful blonde haired damsel in distress. These dreams are disrupted, however, by the real world where computer malfunctions and bureaucratic policies such as "information retrieval" destroy the lives of innocent citizens.

The following three scenes from this film are good examples to use in class to illustrate the different characteristics of a bureaucratic and a technological dystopia. The first three scenes show how the mindless bureaucracy of the Information Retrieval Department mistakenly arrests an innocent citizen. The fourth scene features the protagonist, Sam Lowrey, battling a household of malfunctioning home appliances as he hurries to get to work on time.

1. "8:49 p.m., somewhere in the 20th century" (0:00:50-0:03:49)
2. "That is your receipt for your husband (0:03:50-0:07:31)
3. "Department of records" (0:07:32-0:10:04)
4. "Dreams and reality" (00:11:07-00:12:33)

I, Robot (2004)

If you're a big fan of Isaac Asimov's collection of short stories published under the same name then this movie will be highly disappointing. The film does, however, provide some good visual scenes of a corporate and technological controlled dystopia. Set in the year 2035, this film depicts a society in which an underclass of robots acts as servants to humans. A policeman, played by Will Smith, does not trust the robots and soon discovers that the robot corporation is covering up a flaw that allows the robots to override their programming that prevents them from doing any harm to a human being.

Gattaca

Gattaca is set in a future when one's life is determined by genetic engineering rather than education or experience. The wealthy can choose the genetic makeup of their descendants. People are designed to fit into whatever role is decided before birth. Citizens in this impersonal future-world are fashioned as perfect specimens, so those in the natural-born minority are viewed as inferior to the pre-planned perfect specimens (aka "Valid") who dominate. One of the natural-borns (aka "In-Valid"), Vincent Freeman, has several defects (poor vision, emotional problems, and short 30-year life expectancy), but he also develops a different outlook on his pre-ordained fate. He yearns to break free from society's constraints, and he dreams of a journey into space as a Gattaca Corp. navigator. To accomplish his goal, he enlists the aid of DNA broker German and makes contact with Jerome Morrow, who was paralyzed in an accident and is willing to sell his superior genetic materials. Vincent assumes Jerome's identity and is scheduled for a flying mission. However, a week before his flight, a Gattaca mission director is murdered, and all members of the program are the suspects. Meanwhile, he develops a romantic interest in a beautiful Valid, Irene, prevented from going into space because of her heart defect. Tracked by a relentless investigator who is methodically jigsawing all the pieces together, Jerome finds his aspirations dissolving into stardust.