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 Images **Disney Studios**

KOSINSKI

puts utopia in its place



A style icon, 1982's *Tron* marked the realization of a virtual world and the first extensive use of 3D CGI in a motion picture. In it, software engineer Kevin Flynn, played by Jeff Bridges, disappears from the real world, having been digitized into the world of a computer. After waiting 28 years, fans can now view Disney's highly anticipated sequel, *Tron: Legacy*. The director, Joseph Kosinski – an alumnus of the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture – invites them to experience his contemporary interpretation of the video-game kingdom originally conceived by writer/director Steven Lisberger.

In *Tron: Legacy*, Kevin Flynn's son, Sam, embarks on a quest to find his father. The words spoken when they finally meet are: 'Long time.' In the computer world that is Tron, almost a thousand years have passed, an age in which Kevin Flynn has crafted this environment almost single-handedly, albeit apparently influenced by the likes of Zaha Hadid, Neil Denari

and Oscar Niemeyer. In the words of the director: 'The beauty of the world of Tron . . . was that the whole thing was created by Kevin Flynn, the master architect.'

What Kosinski calls Flynn's 'singular vision' is part of what makes Tron a heroic and beautifully designed domain, highlighted by bold elegance and dynamic shapes. The world of Tron did not grow organically; it appeared as a fully mature place. While these aspects fit the storyline of *Tron*, real-world examples designed with a singular vision are often inhuman and sterile. Architecture's permanence inevitably produces a platform for super-egos to express singular visions of the world. In modern times, the promise of permanence has given rise to the starchitect: take Niemeyer, for instance, a man whose distinctive imprint characterizes Brasília, a city developed between 1956 and 1960 on an empty plateau, following an urban design by Lúcio Costa.

It marked an effort to cleanse Brazil of its colonial past in tabula-rasa fashion. Pedestrian space was taken over by soulless, runway-like roads inspired by Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse and New York expressways realized by Robert Moses. Political egos and totalitarian regimes have had an even more frequent impact on history: architecture as a means to express power and immortality instantly brings to mind Mussolini's EUR and Hitler's unbuilt vision for Germania and the Thousand Year Reich.

According to the makers of *Tron: Legacy*, 'Tron City was once a thriving metropolis, a utopia and living vision of the future created by Kevin Flynn.' Under the reign of his programmed alter ego, Clu, 'it has become a much darker place' – a visual metaphor for the failures of the modernist utopian philosophy. It's safe to say that a singular design vision attains cohesion only at the expense of individuality. What's left is the seed of a dystopia.