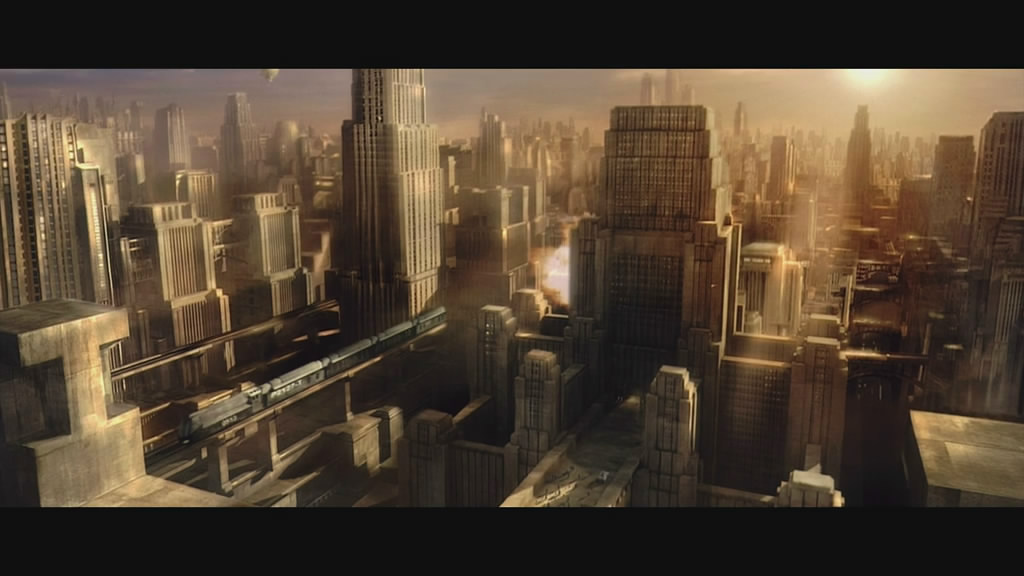
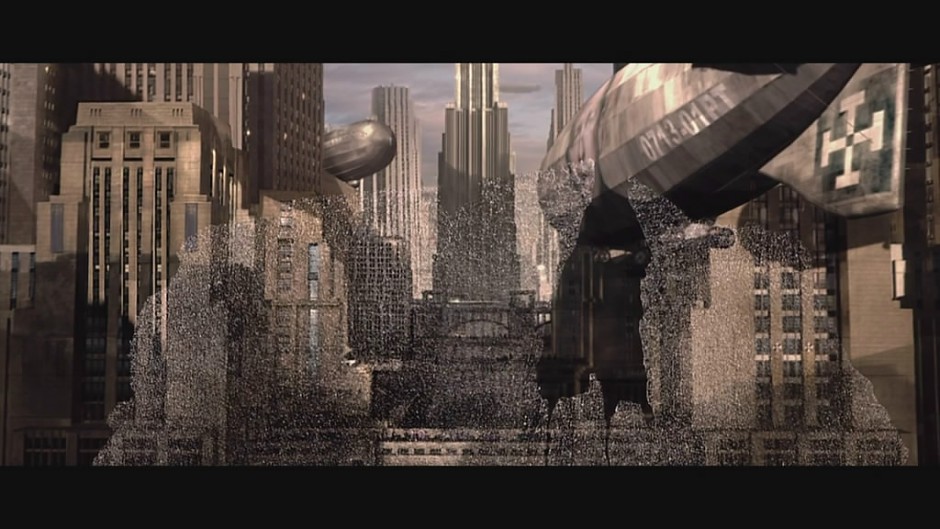
SETTING IMAGES FOR EQUILIBRIUM

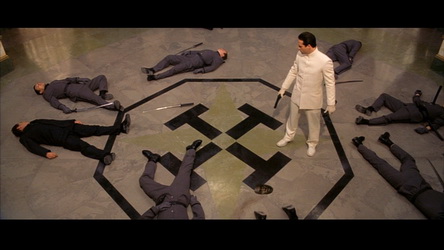
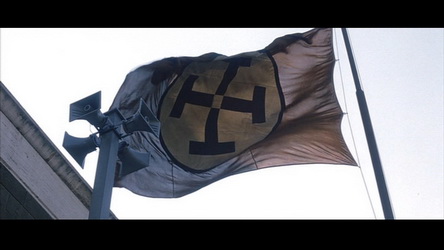
Comments by students from a media class (<http://www.tboake.com/443-equilibrium-f2009.html>) adapted by SMcCann. Comments also focus on setting, symbolism, use of colour, camera angles, costuming .











The movie Equilibrium makes use of the Tetragrammaton, which is an occult mystic symbol, specifically from Kabbalism, or Jewish mysticism. The Tetragrammaton, or the Great Four Letters are the following: Yod He Vau He, and is the great and unpronounceable sacred word, YHVH. This is where terms like Jehovah and Yahweh come from. The swastika used in Nazism to represent their ideology, which was totalitarianism, has a similar look. This is the connection in which the movie was trying to make, as well as the religious reference (the head official being called the “Father – this serves to emphasise the ungodly nature of his role).  
  
In Equilibrium, the geometric order of the symbols and buildings represents the desire for order and peace. However, this over emphasis on the rational as opposed to apparently uncontrollable emotion as an attempt to avoid war and violence, actually leads to chaos.   
  
This film is about the human condition and how we act and react to the conditions of our lives. The use of symbols and graphics, the setting, and the wardrobes combine to present a strong image of this future dystopia. In Equilibrium, the symbol’s iconography is blatant and literal (clear reference to the Nazi Regime). In Equilibrium the graphics speak to the nature of the world the characters inhabit. This world is in a form of a totalitarian fascist world government where everyone is the same, and in precise order and symmetry, exactly like the city.



Symmetry as a symbol of oppression/power.

In the reality that we are familiar with, we see many instances of symmetry on a daily basis, not just in architecture but in countless furniture and objects. Symmetry is sometimes simply used because it is visually pleasing to the eye. Ancient Greek architecture reached the highest levels of beauty through its mathematical symmetry and balance. Symmetry in all of these instances is not disturbing but what makes it so unsettling in Equilibrium?

In my opinion, it is because the power that is repeatedly expressed through the film's symmetry is that of one man, one dictator - the 'Father'. In one of the settings his face alone is displayed at the scale of a building and placed on multiple facades in the same oppressive symmetrical layout of the street. In the area where his army gather the building backdrop is also an overpowering in its scale and symmetry, displaying again an oversized screen on which the Father speaks.

The degree of symmetry in the visual look of Libria goes beyond simply creating a reality of regularity and order, but suggests an overwhelming sense of hierarchy and organization to the point that it does not appear human. The lack of humane, emotive qualities in the filmed environments emphasizes the emotionless world that the citizens of Libria are forced to live in. The appearance of emotion and rebellion in the film disrupts this smooth flat existence. In several scenes this disorder is portrayed visually by a break in the symmetry, for example as the cleric runs through crowds.



Use of high angle shot (Equilibrium).

The use of high angle shots in film is used to manipulate the audiences view towards the character being viewed in the high angle shot. This type of shot is generally used in film to convey the message that the subject is vulnerable or powerless. However, it also used at times to show power of a central character in the film by showing the high angle shot as this powerful characters view in the film. This is effective in showing that this character is making the rest of the character’s feel vulnerable or powerless.   
  
This is most evident in the film Equilibrium. The use of high angle shots in this film cements the “big brother” feeling of this film. In Equilibirum, no one has any emotions and is monitored constantly. The high angle shots used in this film emphasise that everyone is just a number and gives the audience a sense that someone is watching over them. This is most effective in the police interview scenes, showing that the character being interrogated is vulnerable and helpless. Hence, the use of the high angle shot effectively brings the audience back to the awareness that these people are constantly monitored and could get caught at any time This shows the person “looking down” from the high angle has the power and the subjects are powerless.. This is effective in promoting anxiety and tension of the audience.

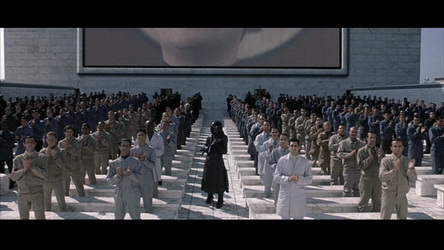


*Escape to the church, which is situated on the "outside" as a refuge for reading poetry. (Remembering that the enforcers are all called Clerics and trained in a monastic way...)*

Many techniques are used in Equilibrium in order to manipulate the viewers perception of reality.   The use of a ruined cathedral as a site for the commission of a ‘sense-offence’ by ranking cleric is an ironic metaphor. A church should be a place of refuge, sacred and dedicated to forgiveness, love and in past history was the refuge of the fugitive who could claim sanctity and avoid death from his pursuers. Here the refuge is temporary, there is no protection and death follows at the hand of a friend.

In Equilibrium, the audience is presented with a version of reality in which the best characteristics of mankind have disappeared, crushed under the boots of the TetraGrammaton Council. The attempt to eliminate war, murder and violence have led to the entrenchment of these attributes in the name of the “new” religion.  While ostensibly created to promote peace, the council embraces extreme and fatal violence as its primary method of enforcement, relying on fear and compulsion to keep the public drugged into obedience. Faith is mentioned several times in the film, typically in relation to unquestioning trust in ‘Father’. Faith is no longer an emotional belief in a power of great goodness and purity. Faith in this film means blind obedience to a tyrant.

The violence of periods such as the Inquisition or the Crusades where religious fanaticism was used to exercise power in the name of something good, is mirrored in the violence committed at the hands of the ruling council of Libria, the religious structure of which more closely resembles an enlightenment sect than an organized religion. Nevertheless, the film mixes in Christian symbolism, conjuring the crucifix for the TetraGrammaton symbol and burning sense offenders in the furnaces of the city in the same way that the church burned heretics at the stake in the *Autos-de-fe* held in public squares.



The relationship between architectural style and the sense of the individual self. (Equilibrium) Note -Items like uniforms can also be included in a setting essay.

“Equilibrium” utilized a certain kind of architectural style to show a totalitarian society where individuality is lost through use of cold, dark tones, almost a monotone setting and minimalism.   
  
In the film “Equilibrium”, the primary colour palette used was gray and blue. This is used to show the oppressive and alienated sterile nature of the society. The rules of the Librian system are simple: citizens are not allowed to feel emotions. The architecture in Librian society has a very rigid and precise form, which reflects the feeling of the people in the film. For example, the head quarters and public squares are all symmetrical, repetitive and rational. No human feelings are expressed through architecture. Everything is cold and monotone. However, for the “underground” world, the interior is full of warm colour ornaments.

In “Equilibrium”, the architectural style is very minimal especially in Preston’s home. There is absolutely no decoration; even the windows are blocked so there is no view to the exterior. Everything is minimal with no colour, no pattern, no decoration and no expression. Homes should be a place of warmth and comfort, but in Preston’s home, there is not even a bed sheet and no extra piece of furniture. Everything is minimized to function only. This clearly shows that the absolute control of government creates a mindless society.. Moreover, people wear uniforms, which symbolize imprisonment and hierarchy- power of one over another.   
  
Uniforms are often worn by school students, factory workers, waiters, prisoners – in other words people of lower status, lacking power. It gives the person an identity of a kind linked to a larger organisation though rather than being individualistic.  In “Equilibrium”, audiences can tell the occupation of everyone from the uniform they wear. Normal citizens wear white and grey loose shirts/overall type garments while the enforcers and clerics wear black leather garments.





The architecture of Libria; the futuristic city in Equilibrium, is based on that of Fascist architecture during the Second World War.  This is done to convey a sense of timelessness and power- buildings that look as though they will last forever.  
  
While the city of Libria is meant to convey power and timelessness through architecture, the outside city, or “Nether” is shown as a shattered mass in an advanced state of decay.  Buildings are torn apart and lying in rubble, and those that are still standing are completely abandoned and void of any signs of life.  Although destroyed, it is something more comforting and familiar to the viewer. The architecture of the Nether is modern and easily identifiable to that of everyday life.  It is depicted this way in order to give the impression of an abandonment of normality in the shadow of some greater and darker vision.

Equilibrium takes place after the World War Three in a city, called Libria, where the dictator has solved the problem of creating lasting peace by using the strength of the armed police force. To avoid a repeat of a world at war, all feelings (positive or negative) have been banned. The resulting society presented by Kurt Wimmer, the director, is strictly divided between masters (the clerics) and servants (population).   
  
In Equilibrium people are condemned to live in an ugly, stripped down society without adornment(in one of the very first scenes, clerics burn the Gioconda's painting).

Libria's look is very oppressive, reminding us of the totalitarian countries (some scenes have been shot in Berlin and in Rome, at the EUR; we can easily recognize the Congress Palace designed by Adalberto Libera), with huge white or grey buildings, placed in a symmetrical order. Indeed, symmetry is used both as symbol of oppression and as celebration of status quo.  
  
I think that another element that increases this sense of control and persecution, is the buildings' size. The first scene shows a city consisting of skyscrapers:  tall, dominating structures. Buildings / structure matter more than people.

The complete absence of colour ( just black and white, the same colour of clothes worn by clerics) can also be seen in John Preston's house. We notice very minimalist furniture, the most important element being the television screen broadcasting Father's speech. In a world without emotion, nothing is essential, except for propaganda.  
  
The order of people’s time and lives is a consequence of the order of places and things. Everybody has the same job, wears clothes in the same way, and even take Prozium at the same moment of the day. There is no choice. Life and architecture are linked and always the same because  they have been imposed by power. The idea of choice itself can't exist. Choice is a mental process involving a judgement of different options, selecting the one we prefer. But this can't happen in Libria.  
  
As a matter of fact, when Preston/Bale doesn't take his dose of Prozium, the first thing he changes is his desk. He disarranges it or, better still, he personalizes it, trying to modify the status quo.

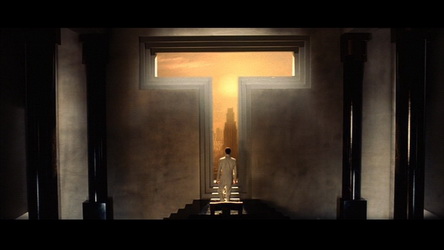
This contrasting situation situation is reflected in the settings. There is a clash between the world of the controlled Librians and the resistance. The hidden places where rebels try to make safe works of art are completely the opposite. They are furnished with books, pictures, as elements to remember the past; they are scented, and they are lit up with candle light or warm yellow bulbs in contrast to cold blue light of the fluorescent lighting in the buildings of Libria. These rooms that look like untidy warehouses are the only places still lived in with sensitivity. These places have been furnished by a free mind, apparently without an order, except the order of free will and individual choice..

DuPont's headquarters are completely different from all the other rooms. It looks like a room in a mansion furnished with marble floors, columns and paintings. There is an element of minimalism (there is just a desk in the whole room) but this implies the role of a leader who is the centre of power. He's the only one, inside the system, who can feel:the leader enjoys the beauty of his perfect world

Dictators have been well known for exercising double standards.  Communist leaders owned wealth and Hitler wasn’t a blond-haired, blue-eyed Aryan.  This notion is explicitly recreated in ‘Equilibrium’ by the extravagantly decorated office of ‘Father’ with its showcased emotion-inducing paintings.  While the citizens of Libria were forced to forfeit any artistic possession, the leader enjoyed quite an appreciable collection.  This double standard is typical of dictatorships.

The room isn’t revealed to us until the very end of the film where it reaffirms the inevitable destruction of the existing, highly idealized, society.



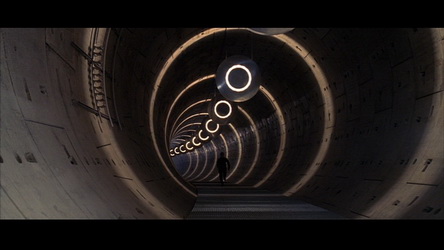
Symbolism

The T is like a cross – suggesting the “saviour” image of the cleric

It also links to the tetragrammaton symbol - a mashup of traditional christian and nazi symbols? The Christ and the anti –Christ?

Tunnels

The architectural character of corridors serve to represent the psychological implications of the film’s narrative on the hero.  
  
In Equilibrium, the monumental and pale colonnades parallel the plain clothes of the crowds and speak of their mind-numbing conformity and obedience to Father and the ‘Tetragrammaton’.  In another scene, John Preston, the main character, is rushing through a tunnel with suspended light pendants.  Here, the monotonous and relentless corridor dramatizes urgency as he desperately tries to get to Mary O’Brien and save her extermination by the un-sympathetic authority that John is beginning to revolt against.  At best, the corridors help depict the struggle between conformity at all costs and the goodness and humanity represented by Mary at the end of the deep corridor.  Perhaps also the sense of being trapped in a narrow world view. His choice to run towards her represents his desire to escape the inevitability of the narrow path laid out for him by Libria. But he cannot do this within the tunnel – he loses her – he cannot prevent her death. It is only when he literally breaks through a wall and descends underneath the world he lives in – to meet the resistance group- that he can break out of the bonds holding him back



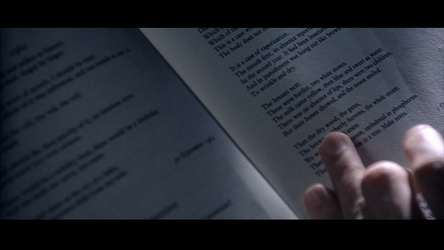
*The use of known political entities (Hitler) in Equilibrium.*

The movie Equilibrium starts with a grand emotion of the society built on dictatorship, hyper-organized, efficient to a point of a giant machine. We see images of political figures- Joseph Stalin, Saddam Hussein, and even Adolf Hitler, symbols that are very similar to Swastika as used by Nazi government. We are introduced to “The Father”, the dictator, the Hitler in this movie, who refuses to be shown in public for his safety.

This strikingly similar imagery and symbolism that are introduced immediately and effectively create an undertone that the government is an evil one, the antagonist in the plot. The association in the unconsciousness of the viewers is intensified by the formation of the resistance and visual images of rallies like that seen in Nazi Germany.

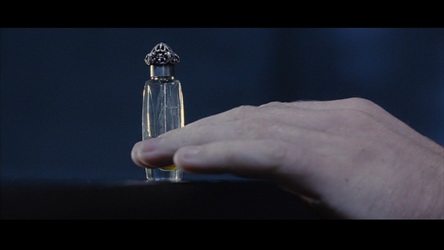


Every urban space within the city in Equilibrium possesses large enough dimensions to allow for ordered, expedient circulation. They all are of a particularly austere character, and built on a monumental scale. These characteristics are epitomized in the large video viewing areas -walls support huge video screens which reflect the massive propaganda machines present. High angle shots are taken from a perspective above the normal human position, looking down a large avenue with nearly identical four story buildings with large, unused arcades on both sides. Each building supports a massive screen while zeppelins supporting similar screens bear down upon the public. At a given moment nearly a third of the urban scene is occupied by identical propaganda. People are overwhelmed by the messages to stay passive and accepting. The street scenes also emphasise this world possesses close to zero tactile interaction at the human scale.



Literature acts as a mediator between the thoughts and emotions of the writer, and the understanding of the reader.

In Equilibrium, the ‘reality’ of Libria is governed by a simple rule that feeling is equivalent to death. Reading or interacting with creations other than that which is approved by ‘Father’ is strictly prohibited. Poetry, an expression of human imagination, is seen as the very thing that manipulates the realities that humans experience in Libria. Any contact with literature or the greater collective of human creations including art pieces, music and artefacts, is outlawed with the fear that it will change the ‘correct’ way a person should think and react to life. Ironically, these items are actually what bring reality back to humanity in that they allows one to contemplate, respond and understand the human emotions put into creating these items. One can observe this return to true reality in the gradual changes in the thought process of cleric John Preston as he stops taking the drug that alters the mind from feeling. Poetry and literature are thus seen as threats to a peaceful and orderly society in Equilibrium.



*The significance of these items overall to the issue of sense offenses in the film. (smell and touch).*

The protagonist in *Equilibrium* lives in an apathetic society of repressed emotion; Once Preston begins to feel these sensory objects awaken the inner core of humanity in him. The objects of sense offense would be unremarkable in familiar settings of the past or present. The futuristic themes and situation is characterised by a set saturated with hard, gleaming surfaces, which make the sensory objects appear foreign.

The essence of the sensory objects in *Equilibrium* is demonstrated by their strong association with human interaction, from shooting through the book in Partridge’s hands, to Preston’s toying of the perfume bottle and his reaction to the feel and scent of the brightly coloured ribbon. These objects demand to interaction, in contrast to the bleak, minimalist setting in which he normally operates. Perhaps significantly, the only artefacts he handles constantly are instruments of death – his guns, and his sword.

The sensory objects and rooms are often faded with age and imbued with time. Secret rooms in *Equilibrium* are lit by dim fluorescents, and provide high contrast to the sharpness and clarity of the light outside.. Sensory objects bring a deliberate sense of nostalgia to the characters of the films as well as the audience. The forbidden objects are accumulated in our past as well as theirs. This connection allows the protagonist to rediscover his roots in humanity though the sense of longing for a former culture and way of life



The use of the older form of gramophone to play the record is deliberate to create a sense of a past long gone*.* This prop creates a sense of a gentler time lost in the new world of Libria where the sounds the citizens hear are endless propaganda speeches and adverts for Prozium.

The soundtrack from Equilibrium has an orchestrated sound design effectively serving to reinforce the dark, gloomy, utopian society, set in the state of Libria after World War III.   
The soundtrack uses a pulsating rhythm to intensify the action and propel the pace of the movie. Slower sequences lend themselves to a more pronounced ambient quality of eeriness, conveying the feeling of a cold utopia with no hate, no love, no anger, no war. It really makes the viewer contemplate the significance of emotions and whether they are worth giving up to eliminate war and all of its associations.   
  
The tonal quality of the music in Equilibrium is consistent throughout the film, a good fit, to reinforce the robot-like existence that this new society is based on. In stark contrast to this, we find Preston listening to Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony during one of his ‘jobs’ and being immensely moved by it, which is the point in the film where we begin to fully grasp the contrast between emotion and the lack thereof.



*The significance of the tearing away of the film on the window. Significance of the initial placement of the film ON the window as a method of "sense" control..*

In Equilibrium the film shows how, to help keep an orderly society, they have pushed the population to a point where they feel a part of something larger than themselves and never think about the fact that they are merely cogs in a far greater system. The concept involves limiting the world view of the majority of the population. The film cover on the window in Preston’s bedroom is symbolically to prevent him seeing clearly. The attempt is to distort  the perception of the society to the point of doubting or not knowing that exterior environment.  He must not ever be allowed to face the bigger questions.

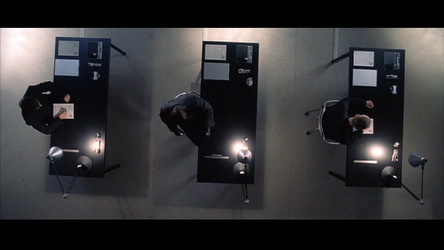
The system that the city works on is that of the neighbourhood watch in the most extreme of scenarios where one cannot count on one’s own son or daughter to keep a secret.   The only difference being that crime no longer exists due to the drug prozium.  So long as everyone keeps taking their dose there are no issues.  For this reason, there is now only a single type of crime which is punishable by death.  One cannot feel, which in turn means, one cannot miss their dose.  This is important because feelings are the root of those deeper questions where one must really consider that they are an individual who walks upright on the face of this Earth.  The film on the window therefore is an attempt to control some particularly difficult aspects;  the view of the city, a strong reference to the context in which one lives. Sunrise and sunset are things of intense beauty which may invoke feelings of awe and awareness of a world greater than the limited world in which this society lives.   
  
 The society in which this movie takes place has decided to cease development both of the individual and of that as a greater entity by removing the spark which would propel it further into whatever destiny that may have been.  These rules seem to be more strict for grammaton clerics as they pose the greatest risk and so most everything sensory is blocked off, as part of their uniform they wear black gloves.  These gloves remove the sensitivity of the fingers and hands, they are also coloured black in order to disguise the blood of all their many victims.  Both of these are shown as significant once John Preston begins to feel. The close ups on Preston’s face and the gloves as he looks at the blood on his gun and on his gloves after the death of the old man reveals how he has begun to feel.



*Use of colour in the film and in reference to "sense" offenses.*

Colour implies spirit, life and imagination. Equilibrium plays on the use of colour and lack thereof to describe the spirit of the places. The “sense” offenders are those who have feeling, and those who have feeling inherently love and have life, their scenes are full of colour, vibrant in paintings, books, even the rays of light that shine through to the underground. Libria however is very unsaturated, minimalist, rational and lifeless. This is a direct representation of the mood of the city. Arguably, colour is used as a device to distinguish between place as well as spirit.

High angled shots

The film Equilibrium used high angle filming sparingly. High angle shots create perspectives from which we can understand a situation more clearly than shown from a personal perspective, such as the shots illustrated here. The contrast between personal experience and new perspective places a particular emphasis on what is portrayed.   
  
The use of high angle shots does however create a moment in which the audience is almost in the position of the viewer who may be the controlling power in this society. The sense of distance as you are elevated above the setting reflects the separation between the viewer and the main character. A sense in which “father” literally has a “God’s eye view” and no real empathy or connection with the people of this world. Equilibrium uses overhead angles at times to distinguish the individual from his surroundings and to emphasize the difference between his visible actions and the inaction of the larger population which surrounds him as a sort of stagnant similarity.

*The nature of "home" and family. (referencing both architecture and social issues).*

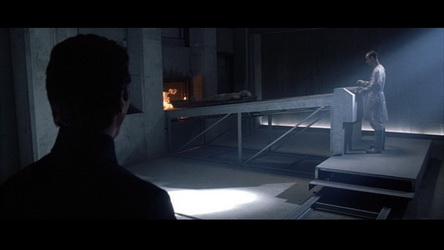
The interior design of the “home” or apartment approaches the Modernist ideal of *minimalism*. The interior architecture and furniture have the “slick” look characteristic to the Modernist ideal of eliminating ornamentation. Complex shapes are rare. Corners are square and sharp. All hard surfaces are matt and buffed to a high gloss. Structure is not articulated, for the most part. Colours are muted: greys, black, and light browns. The “home” has a decidedly NOT-lived-in quality. Real homes should be full of *stuff*, they should look like people have lived in them and deposited years of accumulated “stuff”, but this home is too clean. Modernist spaces of this nature make one feel particularly uncomfortable if the function of the space is supposed to be for “living in”. They are not conducive to engendering feelings of comfort, ease, or dwelling, which is probably why the film makers chose this look for the home in the film. Bale and his two children do not look *uncomfortable* in this environment but neither do they look relaxed. They seem to accept this cold space as normal which just heightens its abnormality for the viewer. The two children are used to create a sense of “family” but then swing to appearing to be “law-abiding citizens”. The son gives a very un-familial vibe when he plays the cleric and mini-dictator, ordering his father to report the loss of his Prozium interval and saying, “What are you doing?” so accusingly; but the feeling of family returns because of the mere proximity of the son and daughter, and the instances where the son inadvertently refers to Bale as “Dad”. Eventually we learn that the stand-offishness of the children, and their exaggerated maturity for their age, is merely a self-preservation measure, concealing true familial feelings underneath and the fact that they are like their mother- sense offenders.

Most visible and perhaps shocking aspect depicted in the film in regards to children, is the elimination of the hierarchy between adults and children, and the amount of responsibility that children carry. This has a close relationship to the theme, which depicts a society at work without emotions, but only driven by logical thinking. The vulnerability of children in today’s world comes from their lack of control over emotion. They are relatively more emotional, and thus have less room for logical thinking, in comparison to adults. However, in ‘Equilibrium’, where no citizen is allowed to feel any emotions, children soak up logical information at extremely fast speed. A society that works without emotions becomes less complicated. Everything becomes much simpler when the only voice you have to listen to is logic, just as a robot would function. When one is completely void of any emotions or feelings, one would develop logical thinking. This allows children to be exposed to high-level sociology and philosophy, just as the son of cleric Preston does through TV. The educator does not create an enjoyable learning environment. It is dry and factual but this is not an issue in ‘Equilibrium’ because nobody is able to feel. This allows children to execute morally daunting tasks, like pointing out an outlaw on streets so the guards can capture him and execute necessary punishment, often death. It is natural in ‘Equilibrium’ because nobody is able to feel, and therefore morality doesn’t exist. Only thing that defines one’s action as right, and the only thing that society promotes, is to follow regulations and duty.

Right and wrong in Equilibrium



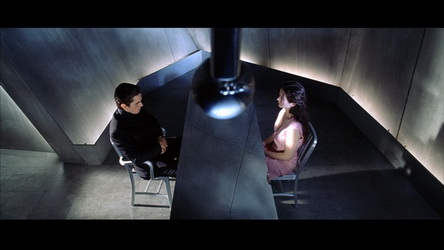
The elimination of people is understood as a means to achieve a justifiable end. Specifically, it is for a “good” cause, in respect to the people committing this murder, as it safeguards their future, or prolongs their existence. For Equilibrium, “Father” believes the lack of emotions and thus, sense offenders, will ensure the survival of the human race. In Equilibrium, these rules are set in stone, and instigated by one dictator. The logic of eliminating chaos and violence through violence seems to have been ignored.

Nature in Equilibrium

Nature within the film Equilibrium is seen as an offense; as a source from which to derive feelings of pleasure and thus undermine the society ..   
  
Equilibrium begins to draw on the connection that human emotions have to the natural environment. An important scene which illustrates this connection is when John Preston begins to feel the sunlight behind the translucent film of his window. Preston proceeds to tear the film off revealing the warmth and colour of the day and this vision of the sunrise overwhelms him with beauty revealing his current state of emotional depth.  
  
Later Jurgen mentions the strength of human nature – ‘disrupt the supplies for one day and human nature will win the battle for us”

Secrecy and surveillance

 In Equilibrium, citizens of Libria devote themselves to a government to keep them safe from war. After the WWIII those who survived and now are citizens of the Libria, had been gulled into believing that the emotions and lack of control on them is the reason for all the miseries of the human being. In order to overcome the war and the following misfortunes and have a civilization without any conflicts, they have decided there should be an intense surveillance on their personal lives to have total conformity. They are not allowed to have any secrecy or privacy since everything must be under control. The Tetragrammaton Council suppresses the citizens’ privacy in order to enforce unity. However, there is an underground movement keeping their emotion as a secret, building in opposition to the government policies with the belief that emotion is the reason why they live. This is the point where the government surveillance is not always successful and the point of conflict which drives the action.

Balance and symmetry



Symmetry is analogous to perfection and beauty. Therefore, in Equilibrium, the relentless symmetry of Libria reinforces its utopian ideal— its balance.

The symmetry of Libria’s architecture plays an important role in the administration of its “perfection” and balance. Indeed, it recalls the Neoclassicism favoured by the Hitler and Mussolini (see photo of EUR, Rome, on the right) compared with scene from Equilibrium,.

Symmetry as a symbol of beauty.

The architecture in the film Equilibrium uses symmetry to convey many messages. The austere, authoritative buildings, public spaces and interior spaces of the ruling government denote power and establishment. These qualities of balance, proportion, strength and solidity through the use of symmetry relay authority, as well as an innate sense of beauty. Through its use of symmetry, the film Equillibrium makes us question our perception of the notion of beauty as it is applied through our architectures but also through our values and morality.

Symmetry implies a sense of harmonious or aesthetically pleasing proportionality or balance. Humans have a deeply ingrained tendency to be drawn to bilateral symmetry which can exist in the human form, as well as human constructs. Symmetry also is appealing and beautiful because of its simplicity. Environments which are simple can seem less threatening and more familiar; everything is clean, visible and in order. The irony or perversity of that condition is that often that appearance of beauty, order and simplicity is a veneer.

Such is the case in the film Equilibrium, where beauty through symmetry is used as a veil to conceal the sinister undertones of the government control imposed on the people of the state. This imposed symmetry and its relative beauty is elaborated in the architectures presented in the film, and serves to challenge our perception of what is beautiful, and at what cost does beauty come? The beauty that is presented to us is sterile and inaccessible. It is beauty without feeling.

In the film, the beauty expressed through symmetry is used as a tool for manipulating the public into a false sense of security, while masking the grave injustice of denying the basic human right of expressing feeling.   The government attempts to abolish the emotions of its civilians, in order to avoid extreme behaviour and therefore avoid war. The protagonist is forced to decide if it is worth having a beautiful, war-free and emotionless civilization, at the cost of his humanity.

The elegant symmetry of the establishment’s buildings is contrasted with the underground world of the resistance. It is here that the protagonist discovers a different sort of beauty which speaks to his humanity. This ‘underworld’ is disorderly, mysterious and symbolic of the human emotions. The underworld is imperfect and unsymmetrical; however he relates to its participants and their way of life. He finds beauty in the imperfections of the environment, and rejects the symmetrical beauty of the establishment.

Backlighting technique



In the film Equilibrium, our protagonist lives in a world where the government blames human emotion for all past atrocities and has, therefore, invented medication to suppress said emotion and made feeling a crime punishable by death.  Throughout the movie, we follow John as he transitions from law enforcer to law breaker, and develops a new understanding about the importance of experiencing human emotion.  In this context, highlighting of the main character is used as an effective foil for the overwhelming idea of monotony and sameness that exists within a world where big brother is always watching for any deviation from the accepted norm.  Backlighting and other accenting of a single character within a scene makes the audience concentrate on the individual; the setting and other actors fall into the background, so we are better able to focus on what the individual is doing, thinking and feeling.  In this film, these techniques allow the audience to more clearly see the personal struggle and evolution of the story’s protagonist.  Furthermore, they can also be said to highlight how solitary a life without emotion would be.

Equilibrium, a film chronicling the journey of an individual, makes use of silhouette to draw attention to the individual, to encourage identification with a specific character.