

20th International Bremen Film Conference, May 6th-10th, 2015

Call for Papers: The Future is Now: Science Fiction Cinema as Audio-visual Blueprint of Histories, Spaces and Sound

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Keynote Speakers: Vivian Sobchack, Sherryl Vint

Science Fiction Cinema as Audio-visual Blueprint of Histories, Spaces and Sound informs the remit of the 20th International Bremen Film Conference. Intriguingly, despite the genre's resilience and regardless of the remarkable commercial success of several Hollywood productions, there is much that has yet to be said about science fiction, many avenues that remain unexplored and regional outputs such as Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America in need of decoding. The mutually imbricated notion of the audio-visual offers another potentially rich outlet for this discussion, for whilst the role of the visual in sci-fi is well established, there has in recent years been a discernable move toward detailed analysis of the soundscapes that inform the genre as several notable publications detail.

In more general terms, science fiction cinema has long been to the forefront in imagining future worlds, alternate societies and fantastical spectacles and since the time of Georges Méliès, has given flight to filmgoers' desire to experience to the fullest, both the wonders of cinema and the possibilities afforded by scientific and technological advancement. An avenue both for joyous escapism and existential anxiety, sci-fi has played an integral part in the development of cinema as a medium and in exposing the faultlines of societal and cultural decay since the concluding years of the 19th century. It is at heart a genre of inherent paradoxes, being at once real and imaginary, plausible and far-fetched, uncannily familiar and puzzlingly strange. Simultaneously, it is both cognitively recognisable and stubbornly elusive to define and herein one might add, lies its power.

Sci-fi resides in the interstices between real and imagined and is granted salience by films that strive, in the words of Vivian Sobchack 'to remove us from familiar experience and perception into the realm of the unknown', while attempting 'for the sake of narrative, meaning, and relevance - to relate their alien images to human and familiar concerns'.

This clash between the familiar and the unknown is apposite when one takes into account sci-fi's propensity for social allegory and frequently the genre's facility for imagining future worlds works as a sort of history in the making. This social function is seldom without flaws and indeed suffers in places from its very indeterminacy and nothing arguably ages worse in cinema than bad science fiction. Even on the level of the sublime, masterworks such as Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* frequently suffer from exposure to the very political climate they seek to engage with, and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War it is not at all difficult to understand why such a film famously met with Siegfried Kracauer's disdain.

Nonetheless, the genre thrives at moments of social upheaval - sci-fi films were amongst the first to engage with 9/11 to name but one prominent recent example - and provides a critical vehicle for political critique and social commentary. To this end we should not be altogether surprised that sci-fi has historically emerged in unlikely places, a trend demonstrably showcased by the small but significant cluster of films that emerged in the DDR in the 1970s for example. Unique in the scope it offers for investigation of time and place, sci-fi allow for the redrawing of spaces both temporal and cartographical precisely because it so often relocates its critiques to alternate elsewhere and leaves sufficient space for interpretation, a useful tool indeed for filmmakers operating within restrictive conditions. Space then as a

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conceptual notion certainly but also as a geographical and physical sphere provides a multifaceted arena for ideologies to be contested and sci-fi films can tell us much by the differing and at-times competing histories they unfurl.

In imagining other worlds, sci-fi says much about present day realities by choosing not just what to include but what to leave out. Sci-fi has then, not just a social role to play, but a responsibility too, given that despite its marginal status, the genre has often been worryingly resistant to multi-faceted conceptualisations of gender and race to give but two prominent examples.

Staged on May 6th-10th 2015, the Bremen Conference will seek to address these issues and more, aiming to quantify the role that science fiction has played historically and to update key debates by exploring its continued relevance as we move ever deeper into the 21st century. The conference will consist of lectures, discussions, film screenings, and performances, and will take place in the local cinema (CITY 46). The conference is addressed to film scholars and historians and is particularly interested in papers that engage with key questions including, but not limited to:

Science Fiction as a mode of interpreting/reinterpreting history

Sci-fi in the 21st century, new departures and themes

Sci-fi and specific historical periods

Alterity and otherness in sci-fi

Science Fiction and Europe

Science Fiction as a site of negotiation between the two Americas

Interstitiality and sci-fi

The role of sound in sci-fi

Abstracts of no more than 300 words (plus keywords, brief bibliography and bio) to be sent no later than October 10th, 2014 to: Dr Aidan Power (power@uni-bremen.de). Please cc Professor Winfried Pauleit (pauleit@uni-bremen.de) and Professor Delia González de Reufels (dgr@uni-bremen.de). A modest stipend will be available to help facilitate chosen speakers' stay in Bremen.