- Science Fiction, Science Fact -

Film pushing the limits of 21st Century technology

 The last sixty years of film have set the curve for both expected and promised developments in science in our society. From the crude rocket adventures of the 1950’s to the more reasonable mars adventures of the 1960’s science fiction films have kept an eye on the innovations of their era in order to create a marvel of future vision.

In our modern era we are overwhelmed with a cornucopia of diverse plot lines and story concepts in which spread thin the possibilities we are expected to witness in our near future. Stanley Kubriks’ [*2001: a space odyssey (1968)*](http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=3&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CDMQtwIwAg&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.imdb.com%2Fvideo%2Fimdb%2Fvi2388329497%2F&ei=IQUCVc-ULIuGyQSMyYHoCA&usg=AFQjCNF5gw2F2OXHbw9Hi7C3DiBadoGoJg&sig2=N8cP3gaXdNP3Vh6ESIvxog&bvm=bv.88198703,d.aWw) set the standard for realistic sci-fi. Using meticulous models, a true 3D space perspective and lighting design; the work completed alongside the opened doors of NASA scientist created the first absolutely believable reality. The expectations of the film audience has never been so high afterwards. We want to see ourselves placed in a “possible” world in which we can follow. Anything that might be considered outlandish or implausible is rejected by the mind of the audience.

Many attempts from the past are based on date lines set in the 21st century and have made predictions about that period which were dead wrong. 2001, Blade Runner and even Back to the Future II set their sights on the early 2000s’ and were way off to sate the least. As fast as technologic developments occur in our world, film is prepared to forecast into the future based on the speed developments have taken place. Today we have muti-core processors, overly advanced cellular devices, a vast tangle of Pico-Bytes of internet information, rudimentary robotics and for some reason automotive vehicles which still use petroleum fuels. Today’s movies are all rooted around these motifs and through the years before the millennium, the motifs were rooted around what had become to date of that period.

Scientist have been chosen to lead the writing development and be “consultants” on films to give them a plausible look. Of recent months was ***“Interstellar” (2014)*** worked on by one of physics elite Kip Thorn was awash in black hole and wormhole theory. Maybe a bit too much for today’s film audience, the science itself was extensive and many were disappointed by the future robot design. The film goer does expect some sort of realism, even if it’s over the top in its reality one should be able to quantify what is being portrayed on the screen.

In two examples of this we have a recent contender with ***“Jupiter Ascending” (2015)*** which was not as popular as its producers had expected. From earlier in the millennium we have ***“Minority Report” (2002)***. The latter had a plot rooted around a special police unit being able to see crimes in the future and surrounded itself with technologies far in advance of what the common American audience might consider farfetched. This is the crux of many a films difficulty in believability. There other examples of far reaching films based on the not so distant future including ***“Children of Men” (2006)*** based in 2027, ***“Looper” (2012)*** based in 2074, ***“I, Robot” (2004)*** projected in the year 2035,***”Sunshine” (2007)*** based in 2057 and the coup d’état ***“A.I.” (2001)*** based on a future very close to modern day.

All of these films and many others have one main underlying theme that is a dystopian future in which the population is in some state of disorder. Films of this caliper have some iota of truth. The world today is dealing with a myriad political issues and religious factions across the globe are all in some state of plight. The dystopia is one of the main plot themes of our modern day.

All things being equal there only three solid plot lines in the genre of science fiction. Of course the dystopian drama where the world is in either a weather caused global climate related disaster ***“The Core” (2003),*** ***“Take Shelter” (2011),”2012” (2009)*** or a World War aftermath scenario wherein the population is attempting to recover from a holocaustic present caused by the military or some biological virus ***“V for Vendetta” (2005),”The Road” (2009), “I Am Legend” (2007)*** and all of ***“The Hunger Games” (2012-20\*\*)***. The space epic; that is either alien based with aliens coming to earth to destroy the humans, teaching us something we need to learn to save us from ourselves or earthlings headed to some far off planet to steal resources or be a part of some galactic nobility i.e. ***“Signs” (2002),”Pitch Black” (2000), “Super 8” (2011), “The Mist” (2007), “Battleship” (2012), “Guardians of The Galaxy (2014)*** and of course ***“Star Trek (2009)*** and ***“Avatar” (2009).*** Then we have a high concept, super technology premise in films. Rooted around some advanced technological advancement or a future where civilization is encompassed by extremely high end technologic advancements including God Damn ROBOTS! Examples of which are ***“I Robot” (2004), “The Matrix Reloaded” (2003), “Transformers” (2007), “Surrogates” (2009), “Robots (2005), “Robot & Frank (2012), “Wall-E (2008)*** and of late ***“Chappy” (2015).***

What the audience expects is something they can understand. As soon as things are pushed too far the viewers are turned away. What drives this mythos is ones expectations. Many individuals believe that the world will have a negative future and we will have a difficult and trying ordeal to pass down to the children of the future. While another group has strong hopes that we will find a method of recovery in which we can utilize our efforts through technology to save us from the tribulations of human destruction al la ***“Transcendence” (2014)***. Science fiction films give us something both to look forward to and to set up a prevention for the possible annihilation of our species. These films give us hope and set forth trends to come. Through the many decades of science based films, technology has had a bench mark to reach, set by those very films. Even today we are bombarded by space drams in which we “relive” the good old days of the Space Shuttle Program with ***“Gravity” (2002),*** telescoped in a vision of exploration with **“Interstellar” (2014)** and the innumerous mars plot movies.

Film budgets from the past decade were awash in special effects. Setting a foundation for the films of today. In the 1990’s special effects were used to create destruction sequences and manifest space crafts and far away worlds which we were to bolster belief in. Today’s films make use of their special effect budgets to subtly layer the impossible within the bread of a believable plot line. We as an audience are becoming numb to the razzle dazzle of the mind blowing efx blockbuster and are more guided toward seeing these high end efx used to create a caricature of some comic book effigy. “Too much” has become its very own definition. The film goer is made susceptible to an endless supply of films from the past. We have seen the passing of thousands of miles of footage beamed past our retinas. The expectations that are garnered from these many hundreds of films only sets the bar for what becomes a blockbuster and what becomes a brick breaker. The innovation of home cinema and E-Cinema has allowed the average person to watch not only dozens of films she/he might be interested in, but also many dozens of films which she/he will tell their friends and family not to waste their time on.

A feedback loop is what has been created especially with science fiction. We live on the cusp of technologic innovation ever second now. The modern flat panel display is as old as 21st century film and the LCD itself is as old as I am (40 y.o.). The development of multi point sound systems and the accelerated design of larger and larger screens give the post-consumer the ability to enhance their viewing experience and with the advent of Amazon, HULU and the like the options available for watching newly developed series and films is only going to become more prolific.

The director and the actor can fall in love with the genre as well. From yesteryear into today 21st century cinema we have the old failure standards with Ridley Scott of ***“Blade Runner” (1982)*** fame along with James Cameron of ***“The Terminator” (1984),*** Steven Spielberg with ***“Close Encounters of the Third Kind” (1977),*** my favorite Daivd Cronenberg of ***“The Fly” (1986)*** and we can’t forsake the one hit wonder Geroge Lucas or the ***“Star Wars” Series (1977-1983)***. All of these directors have soak their careers in the waters of science fiction films and left their audiences with film which revel most of their contemporaries to date. We are currently living in age where these great film makers will be leaving a vacuum of talent with their passing. All of the listed directors are over 50 years of age and only a scant handful of younger directors are currently left to drive the great star ship of sci-fi into the next sector of the 21st century. Leading captain is the 49 year old J.J. Abrams who has managed to direct the two biggest science fiction franchises in cinema history Star Trek & Star Wars. The former has set a precedence for influencing a large majority of today’s leading young physicist. The Star Wars franchise is estimated to have garnered over $27 billion dollars since its creation and Star Trek has grossed over $5 billion dollars. The Star Trek TV series has had six incarnations and has ran consecutively for eighteen years, the one thing it has ahead of its rival Star Wars.

With no end in sight, the science fiction genre has no conceivable end. Grossing over $6 billion dollars within the last fifteen years, influencing the present day scientist and engineers and ever continuing to widen the eyes of the world’s youth; sci-fi is not only here to stay it’s here to test our theories of how we as a society forge ahead into our future.

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