

James Chapman and Nicholas J. Cull, *Projecting Tomorrow: Science Fiction and Popular Cinema* (London: IB Tauris, 2013), pp. 240, ISBN: 978-1-78076-410-8 (pb), £15.

Chapman and Cull's *Projecting Tomorrow* should be considered as a follow-up to their previous collaboration, *Projecting Empire* (IB Tauris, 2009), which dealt with cinematic representations of empire and imperialism. Using historical archives, production notes and other reception materials they intricately weave a convincing narrative that focuses not only on the significance of the science fiction genre in cinema history but also its value as a cultural form, reflecting and interrogating the important historical, social and cultural moments of our time. Indeed, as the authors assert in their introduction, 'The history of cinema and the history of science fiction have run parallel ever since their simultaneous points of origin at the end of the nineteenth century' (1); therefore we might understand that cinema is, in its very essence, a science fiction medium. Throughout *Projecting Tomorrow* Chapman and Cull make the case that the films they discuss are evidence of the increasingly sophisticated technologies of modes of production used to make them, and highlight the changing attitudes to film as a medium for cultural critique and social commentary:

Futuristic narratives and images of SF cinema are determined by the circumstances of their production... SF cinema functions in a similar way to the historical film as a commentary on the times... [and] cinema's imagination of the future has [...] functioned as a mirror of the present (7).

The book is divided into twelve chapters that each focus on a particular film, drawn from a well-known list of seminal British and American productions. The authors admit themselves that the list could have been considerably larger or even completely different, but “nevertheless all the films are of interest for their narrative and visual representations of the future... and for their role in shaping the genre” (7). So, with a list of case studies that includes *Just Imagine* (1930), *Things to Come* (1936), *The War of the Worlds* (1953), *The Quatermass* films (1955, 1957, 1967), *Forbidden Planet* (1956), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Planet of the Apes* (1968), *The Hellstrom Chronicle* (1971), *Logan’s Run* (1977), *Star Wars* (1977), *RoboCop* (1987), and *Avatar* (2009) Chapman and Cull acknowledge that an alternative list could have provided the book a different set of case studies: *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), *The Omega Man* (1971), *Westworld* (1973), *Dark Star* (1974), *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), and *Starship Troopers* (1997). While I wouldn’t argue against the contents of either list it would have been nice to see a filmic example from the 1990s included in the final volume. There is almost a twenty-year gap between chapter eleven’s discussion of *RoboCop* and twelve’s analysis of *Avatar* which might have been filled with a film like *The Lawnmower Man* (1992). Since *Projecting Tomorrow* is pitched at uncovering the production histories of science fiction cinema and its use of new technologies to imagine the future, a film like *The Lawnmower Man* - marketed at the time for its use of the latest cutting-edge CGI technology - would surely fit well.

Nevertheless, *Projecting Tomorrow* deftly negotiates the key films discussed; the fact that some of the films have been repeatedly picked apart elsewhere does not detract from Chapman and Cull’s analysis of any. Their chapter on *Star Wars*, for example, provides a fresh and illuminating account of the film’s production history and cultural impact.

Unpacking how it was received by critics at the time, they recount how its message of

morality and faith was not ignored: ‘Gene Siskel in the *Chicago Tribune* hailed the film as a work of moral value in Platonic terms that expresses “ideals like goodness and virtue so that we are able to imagine them once again” (171). It is important to record such positive examples of contemporary reception as a corrective to the negative reactions the film received, as defined by other reviews Chapman and Cull also discuss relating to race and the “black-lash over *Star Wars*” (172). Much scholarship on *Star Wars* follows the line that since it was received as pure entertainment it must only ever be considered as that, lacking in any serious cultural worth, and that George Lucas was simply being nostalgic for his own lost youth. Yet, Chapman and Cull remind us that the impact the entire franchise has had on the entertainment industries is unparalleled and that, while “the films still trade on nostalgia... it is no longer nostalgia for a lost world of pirates, westerns, samurai or wartime heroics. Today *Star Wars* trades on nostalgia for *Star Wars*” (175). Whether one thinks this is necessarily a bad thing is open to debate, but thankfully the authors leave it up to their readers to make up their own minds.

By way of conclusion to their work the authors highlight a number of tensions within the genre on screen. Firstly, they argue that the literary and cinematic versions of science fiction have seldom sat well together. Tensions between adaptations and literary sources have often meant authors have fallen out with producers, directors and studios. Frequent cases of copyright infringement suggest that science fiction as a popular genre also attracts popular press coverage and controversy. The second tension surrounds science fiction film’s relationship to the small screen, and how television has often been more successful in adopting generic tropes and visual techniques to present varied interpretations of what the future might bring. Thirdly, tensions have arisen between science fiction audiences and its producers, not least embodied by the repeated fall-outs between Lucas and *Star Wars* fans over countless fan edits and movies. However, Chapman and Cull are keen to point out the

importance of fan audiences within the history of the genre on screen (extending the lifespan of both its popular and less well-known texts), arguing that new technologies of fan production and sharing (such as social media) are integral to Hollywood's continued proliferation of science fiction films. Finally, the authors recognise the tension between British and American productions. In many cases it is difficult to completely associate one country with the production of a particular film. *2001* was a joint enterprise: American money and British crew; similarly, *Star Wars* was an inherently American text but filmed in the UK and replete with British acting talent.

Perhaps, in documenting these tensions, we can better understand how important the genre still is in terms of global film production and its devoted fan audiences. The market for science fiction is bigger than ever: UK and American films share the stage with Japanese, Russian, Canadian, French, Danish, Belgian and Australian science fiction films, television series, comics, games and graphic novels. Indeed, while Chapman and Cull conclude, "After a century or more of SF cinema there is still a universe to discover" (221), it might be said that future histories of the genre should look to its transmedia evolution in order to offer further insight to its continued success and popularity. For now, *Projecting Tomorrow* is an excellent addition to the world of science fiction scholarship and should be required reading for all those who consider themselves enthusiasts of the genre.

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