

Technological Development, Emotions and the Humane: Representations of Progress in 21st-Century Sci-Fi Films

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Abstract

Since the Enlightenment, the notion of scientific progress had been associated with the ideas of growth and development. Even in the period of the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century, technological development was seen to lead to societal development and the improvement of the human condition. The idea of technological advancement is well represented in sci-fi films, which focus on topics such as humans' interaction with aliens, artificial intelligence, human memory and our perception of reality, space and time travel, and/or post-apocalyptic worlds. Prior to the advent of the use of CGI-effects in filmmaking, sci-fi films relied on spectacular visual representations of technology. Nowadays, however due to these effects (Sobchack, 2014) sci-fi films do not appeal to the viewer anymore to the extent it did before.

Due to their inability to extend in the direction of representation of technological development, sci-fi films of the twenty-first century tackle another aspect of Man, namely emotions. Whether presenting a race against time in space, a flight from shady government agents on the still-recognizable Earth, or a car-chase in a barren, post-apocalyptic world, these films depict the technological aspects of progress, in the context of emotions.

These films suggest that progress, either improving or harming the individual or the collective sphere, is not to be considered without addressing the issues of consciousness and human emotions. Representations of utopian or dystopian worlds are permeated by questions such as what it means to be human and how we can retain our humanity in the face of the changes generated by progress.

Furthermore, twenty-first-century sci-fi films do not present progress in view of the dichotomy of good and bad. It is not change - progress or regress - that really matters, but how humans respond to these changes and whether they can or are willing to retain their human nature. We propose to investigate how (technological) development is portrayed in the context of emotions by means of a close reading of sci-fi films produced in the past one and a half decade.

Keywords: sci-fi films, technological development, emotions, consciousness, dystopia.