German Science-Fiction Films (Chicago Oct-Nov 08)

Massimo Perinelli

The 2008 Biennial Conference of Film & History
“Film & Science: Fictions, Documentaries, and Beyond”
Chicago, Illinois
30.10.2008-01.11.2008

AREA: “Fantastisch” – German Science-Fiction Films

This Area looks at German history and its distinct epochs (or even trans-epochal aspects) via the genre of the Science Fiction film. Ranging from the ‘paper-mâché’-ish beginnings of early German cinema to the digital high-gloss landscapes of today’s virtual worlds, the Science Fiction film has responded to historical currents by gauging (often unconsciously) the moods, anxieties, hopes, and fantasies of a society. How has German culture reinvented itself through fantasy films? How has German SF, as a genre, reacted to the politics, the technology, popular culture and of its day?

The paper topics could, for instance, focus on the following themes:
- the dreams and/or nightmares resulting from the incipient industrial modernism in early silent pictures
- the articulated presentiments and paranoia emerging against the background of totalitarianism during the time of the Weimar Republic and the early 1930s (e.g., the German exile movie)
- the desire for purity and the staging of fascist fantasies of ‘Weltherrschaft’ during the National Socialism movement
- the attempt to draft new and better worlds during immediate post-war periods in order to overcome the culpable past and to recreate the society
- utopian sites in the course of revolts towards the end of the 1960s and in the new social movements as from the 1970s
- dystopian projections of the future during the Cold War and societal upheavals during the 1980s
- (post-)apocalyptic scenarios of doom after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, especially after 9/11

Further analytical topics are possible:
- the sci-fi movie of the GDR

- transnational effects and their cinematic adaptation
- other historical events or historiographies

Both trans-epochal aspects and intra-epochal aspects intrinsic to the genre of German Science Fiction films are likewise possible:
- utopias/dystopias of gender
- animals/monsters
- science and mechanization
- the writing of history projected into the future
- bodies and automatons
- religious or apocalyptic projections in the course of the 20th century
- historical analysis of the reception of foreign/US-American Science Fiction films

Although this Area identifies cinematic productions, television programs and serials, as well as the adaptation of film to and from television, are likewise most welcome.

Please send your 200-word proposal by November 1, 2007 to

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Panel proposals for up to four presenters are also welcome, but each presenter must submit his or her own paper proposal. Deadline for first-round proposals: November 1, 2007.

This area, comprising multiple panels, is a part of the 2008 biennial Film & History Conference, sponsored by The Center for the Study of Film and History. Wheeler Winston Dixon, James Ryan Professor of Film Studies at University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and author of Visions of the Apocalypse and Disaster and Memory, will be a Featured Speaker. For updates and registration information about the upcoming meeting, see the Film & History website http://www.filmandhistory.org.

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