

GLOBAL FUSION 2011

PANEL PROPOSAL

RESISTANCE AND “THE FUTURE”: SHOULD WE BE OPTIMISTS, PESSIMISTS, HUMANISTS, NIHILISTS, ... ?

PAPERS & PANELISTS:

Singularity and Collapse: Optimism in the Post-Millennial World Order
Tristan Brown, Temple University

Resistance and Future Shock in Science-Fiction Films
Osei Alleyne, Temple University

Art, Angst, and Acceptance in Post-Millennial Expression
Jarice Hanson, The University of Massachusetts-Amherst

Metanarratives in Meaningless Universe?
Barry Vacker, Temple University

CONTACT:

Barry Vacker, Temple University
bvacker@temple.edu

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The year 2000 was once a signpost for “the future” — that world of tomorrow filled with utopian possibilities for art, media, technology, and human civilization. Now, more than a decade into the millennium and ten years after 9/11, that “future” has given way to our present moment. We inhabit a culture shaped by a strange mix of:

- globalization and tribalization
- technology and ecology
- imperialism and anti-intellectualism
- terror and torture
- crisis and catastrophe
- creationism and consumerism
- enlightenment and entertainment
- postmodern and premodern
- progress and reversal
- science and superstition
- social media and cultural illiteracy
- hyperreality and the denial of reality.

Given these conditions, it is no wonder that many are resisting “the future” as it appears to be unfolding. And it is not surprising to find a global media zeitgeist filled with pessimism, skepticism, nihilism, and so on. Yet, we also see surprising glimmers of optimism and humanism. It seems much of the negative attitudes are based in the effects of nations and their totalizing governments, corporations, empires, ideologies, theologies, and technologies. In contrast, the optimism and humanism mostly resides in the belief that art, science, and technology can serve the ends of ecological protection and human improvement, enlightenment, and empowerment.

Drawing from theorists such as Debord, Virilio, Sagan, Sartre, McLuhan, Lyotard, and Baudrillard, this panel will speculate on the pessimism, optimism, humanism, and nihilism expressed in various works of art, film, and scientific discovery. This panel will be engaging and entertaining, while offering the chance to reflect on the deeper feelings and attitudes toward resistance and “the future.”

PAPER 1

Singularity and Collapse: Optimism in the Post-Millennial World Order

The fragmented and deterritorialized (hyper)realities of the present age are most commonly situated within a context of fear, anxiety, dislocation, and violence, yielding dystopian evaluations of our present and apocalyptic predictions for our future. In spite of this condition, we are living in a profoundly optimistic time. This paper will explore the disparate optimisms expressed in Ray Kurzweil’s “transcendent man”, Jaron Lanier’s humanist cyborg, and the liminal communes of the “Invisible Committee,” visions alike only in their unfashionable faith in the possibility of a better future for humanity.

PAPER 2
Resistance and Future Shock in Science-Fiction Films

Philosophers have long attempted to grasp the human condition and speculate on the future of mankind. Scientists deploy the telescope and microchip to map the macro and the micro universe, in hopes of dispelling ignorance and charting human destiny. Accelerating toward the technological unknown, however, societies are suffering a Tofflerian “future shock,” paralyzed with questions about power, resistance, and purpose. Similarly, in much science-fiction cinema, technology looms as a Frankenstein to destroy our lives, identities, or ecosystems. To better understand technological pessimism and discover any grounds for optimism, this paper will explore resistance of “the future” in *Avatar*, *Gattaca*, and *Children of Men*.

PAPER 3
Art, Angst, and Acceptance in Post-Millennial Expression

As McLuhan explained, there are only two types of people who can see the present as it really is: children and artists. This paper examines authors of post-millennial fiction and playwrights who uncover themes that express terrorism as a way of life, and the ambiguity of reality in the post-9/11, hyperreal world. Using ideas from Virilio and Baudrillard, the themes of terror(ism) and simulacrum play out in contexts that normalize fear and angst in these cultural forms. The cathartic experience of the fictionalization of life normalizes brutality and gives audiences a choice of interpretations among a set of multiple meanings.

PAPER 3
Metanarratives in a Meaningless Universe?

In *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Jean-Francois Lyotard theorized the entropy of “metanarratives” in the modern world. But, media and media technologies provide two very different metanarratives for humanity. On Earth, the media provide stories of good and evil, nations and leaders, ideologies and theologies, power and resistance, and so on. Floating in the cosmos, media technologies (space telescopes) provide a vast universe, with Earth becoming less significant the further we see into the universe. Why is this cosmic narrative resisted and ignored, thus providing zero influence on future metanarratives for Earth? Is the universe that meaningless? Which metanarratives should be resisted? Should we be humanists or nihilists?