

PREFACE

I must have been about ten years old when my parents proudly demonstrated their new tape recording machine. They had recorded a conversation with friends that had taken place a few days earlier. Of course they were primarily showing off the wonders of this technology to their children, but I distinctly recall that the discussion I heard revolved around their confusion over what was meant by the closing sequence in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1968), a film that they had recently seen. This may have been the event that sparked my interest in the science fiction genre as I remember wishing I had seen the images that had caused so much debate. In my teenage years, without really knowing what I was looking for, I was drawn to the science fiction novels of John Wyndham, Doris Lessing and Arthur C. Clark. In retrospect I think that a form of quiet teenage rebellion had much to do with my interest in the genre at this time. Escaping from the ‘girly fantasies’ offered by the likes of *Jackie* magazine or the BBC television series *Ballet Shoes*, science fiction seemed to offer me a far more exciting and thought provoking landscape of opportunity. This quiet rebellion was further compounded when I managed to slip in to see my first ‘X’ film, *Zardoz* (dir. John Boorman, 1974), at barely fifteen years of age. Less interested in the sex scenes than the kaleidoscope of colourful and surreal imagery set before me, this illicit viewing left me with the feeling that I had acquired some kind of sneak preview to the future. It was not until years later that I would come to examine and question the attractions of science fiction. So, in some part, this book is the result of a reflective process that was set in motion when I returned to higher education in the early 1990s.

While I retain a subjective fascination with the science fiction film genre, my aim with this book was to place the thematic and formal concerns raised by science fiction films within wider cultural and historical contexts. The book therefore follows the history and development of the film genre by situating the films under discussion. It seemed to me that this was what was missing in the few broad based academic accounts of the genre. For instance, Vivian Sobchack's *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (1993) was largely concerned with mapping out the genre's visual and narrative conventions. To do this each chapter drew upon an eclectic range of examples from a variety of historical periods. Sobchack's skilful account of the formal elements of the science fiction film certainly paved the way for its serious, academic consideration, but I was keen to trace some of the historical influences and pressures that informed the development of this genre. Furthermore, although J. P. Telotte's more recent publication, *Science Fiction Film* (2001), is a usefully concise introduction for students, its brief report on the historical trajectory of the American film genre does not engage with the interplay between different national and transnational cinemas. This is an important area given the genre's centrality in an increasingly globalised film market. In understanding the genre as existing beyond the American limits imposed by earlier academics, my own book offers analysis of this kind of interplay by looking at British, Australian, French, Russian and Japanese cinema's engagement with science fiction as part of an overall aim to place films within the cultural context from which they emerged.

Although my study follows a chronological line from early film through to contemporary science fiction, each chapter also focuses upon a specific topic. From the outset I knew that it would not be possible to write an exhaustive account of this hugely prolific genre, so I elected to concentrate on what I felt were dominant or important issues in dealing with a specific period. That is not to say that each of the chapters are somehow divorced from one another, aside from my making references back and forth, it is my hope that readers will relate some of my propositions and ideas to a broader range of examples than those I have chosen.

In the act of locating the films under discussion I have drawn upon a variety of approaches. In my efforts to provide both a breadth and depth of analysis, this study makes free use of a range of popular texts and reviews, as well as previous academic work in the area. I also apply pertinent academic theory in scrutinising the principles and aesthetic conventions of the films, as set within the historical and cultural context from they emerged. In addition, I have included a number of original interviews with practitioners, which I carried out as part of my research for this book. Although I do make reference to the interviews in my analysis of the films, after much consideration I decided to include these as separate from the main body of each chapter. There were several reasons for this decision. First, I was struck by the amount of information imparted by my

interviewees and appreciated their thoughtful comments in answer to my questions. The material gathered seemed valuable to me and while I approached the transcripts in a critical manner, I was reluctant to simply take quotes out of context in compiling my own ideas about the genre. This book has therefore given me the opportunity to present my interview material as a further resource for study, as well as a kind of parallel story in looking at the historical development of the genre. The interviews shed further light on the production processes involved in making specific films as well as offering some insight into how these practitioners view their own work within the field. It was necessary to edit some of the interviews, but I have kept this to a minimum. In this way I hope that I have done some justice to this material and have conveyed as accurately as possible the discussions that took place.

Finally, I would like to point out that in dealing with such a wide range of examples it was not always possible to provide synopses of the films. However, I have endeavoured to provide an outline of a film's narrative or of specific visual sequences where I have felt that it was especially appropriate and also where I was dealing with less well known films. To some extent, I have assumed that readers are familiar with many of the mainstream films I discuss or that they might supplement their reading by seeking out films that they have not previously seen.