The Shape of Things to Come:
Visual Aesthetics of Science Fiction
1990-2000
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Abstract:

No genre of art delivers the sheer quantity and quality of inventive design as science fiction in its visual form.
Its very nature, as a form of art driven by the emotion of wonder tempered by the restraint of scientifically based hypotheses,
ensures concepts and designs that are beautiful and awe inspiring but also rooted in the technology and science of their day.
This combination of imperatives makes visual science fiction the premier theatre for conceptual technological design.
Freeing engineering and design from the practical considerations of its real world production counterparts,
and providing a forum for artistic expression characterised by pure, non representational aesthetic beauty, we are given an insight into the true aesthetics sensibilities of an age.
This research paper is concerned specifically with the 1990's, a decade which underwent a revolution in digital technology.
This digital revolution had a huge impact on the technology and design aesthetics of the time, and this is clearly seen in the aesthetics of the science fiction films and games.
Computer and video games are of particular interest for the study of 1990's aesthetics, as it was in the latter half of this decade that the technical limitations of the technology began to allow for realistic visions of the future;
visions of a future populated by the same technology responsible for these graphical improvements.
What this paper shows, after going into a detailed analysis of the nature of the trends and motifs of the visual aesthetics of the 1990's, is how they belie the anxieties and hopes of their creators surrounding the technologies they are portraying onscreen.
The conclusion is that there is a definite observable pessimistic undercurrent surrounding the possible effects of cyberspace on society, coupled with a sense of hope for how this new technology will empower the disenfranchised.
It is also found that the glorification of future technology from this period centres largely on the beauty of machines and physical hardware, rather than their specific wondrous futuristic capabilities.