

KNOWING THE TIME, KNOWING OF A TIME

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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The Entertainment of Apocalypse, the Apocalypse of Entertainment

Michael Tolkin
Keynote Address

I want to thank Richard Landes for inviting me to give the keynote address. In Jewish liturgy kinot are poems of lamentation read to commemorate the destruction of the temples, which would be an appropriate cross-lingual cognate for this conference if everyone obsessed with the millennium or the apocalypse weren't also nourished and delighted by this sub-category of intellectual porn. We wouldn't be here if we didn't love the end of the world; we don't mourn the end of the world, we want a sky box. The millennium is our entertainment and vocation.

Tonight I want to talk about the movies and the millennium, I'll be talking about movies and the millennium, although when I say millennium I probably mean apocalypse. From some of the conversations I've already heard around Richard's table, I know that some of what I'll be talking tonight will fit your own theories, even if I'm not approaching the subject from within your own theoretical framework.

So.

Variety called me last week, the reporter found the conference on the internet and while I expected him to ask me what I'd be talking about he was more interested in my advice for Hollywood. How should Hollywood deal with the millennium? Was Steven Spielberg right, he wanted to know, for delaying his production of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, which would have been released next fall, because he thinks no one will be in the mood for a drama about the Japanese three months before the New Year. I said that I didn't know if the audience will be more likely to turn from a sensitive film next fall than this fall. This was before I finally understood the panic around Y2K. If Hollywood was just waking up to the millennium as a subject, it's too late to cash in, because of the time it takes to make a film. I also said that I thought that as material for drama, the millennium would turn out to be one big Kohutek; from the perspective of a studio, the visible events would be too small for their radar, and I said the story that interested me most would follow the events after the expectations were dashed.

That the millennium itself won't be a moment of Messianic return doesn't mean I deny it as a moment of true apocalypse. What I want to talk about tonight is story, in a method that I hope will be discursive and rambling. This will give us something to talk about when I'm finished, because I know some of my ideas tonight will be incomplete. With the end of the

world so close, I felt it essential that I take my fifteen best ideas and whittle them down to twenty.

I have always loved doom. I'm old enough to have survived duck and cover bomb drills in the 50's and 60's. The teacher would call out 'flash!' (this was the radio version of a nuclear war) and the class drop to the floor. Once, I didn't. First, because I was the son of Alfred E. Neumann and Dr. Strangelove and Rod Serling; I had been trained in suspicion and hopelessness and finally a deep cosmic faith that all of this would be over and with it, homework. And that's not a joke.

If the bomb were to fall, I wanted a good seat. Years later, in my first job in Hollywood, as a writer on a show called Delta House, which was the official spin-off of Animal House, my brother and I wrote an episode set during the Cuban missile crisis. The straight arrow Omegas descend into the bomb shelter. Meanwhile the bacchanalian Deltas, unconcerned with survival, set out on the front lawn of the fraternity house, with their tanning mirrors and beer, waiting for the big one, but not without amusing themselves; they build a diorama of death around the Omega periscope, so the Omegas look out at the smoking ruins of a desolate world. The Deltas defend their disinterest in survival with the same declaration I made in the ninth grade, "Just think, we're the first generation in history that has a chance to be the last."

The show was cancelled.

When I was twenty-one I wrote a script about a town in the California desert that is passed by when the freeway is built, without an exit for the town, and as I was writing this talk I realized that I had used the story of Lot and his daughters after Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed – the script was about incest.

My second novel, *Among the Dead*, is about a plane crash. So the evidence is there: I like disaster. My favorite natural disasters are floods and tidal waves. Turn to your neighbors and ask them, what's your favorite disaster? You might find something in common with a stranger. Come on, the conference is beginning, this is my contribution towards breaking the ice.

As I said last night, I try to avoid interpreting my own work. I've been influenced by Theodore Adorno in this, and I'll be quoting from him later. My reason is not just one of coy modesty, but it's an attempt to forestall the end of the world. When Grove Atlantic published a collection of my screenplays, I had to choose which draft I'd print. I looked at the published script for *Mona Lisa*, I think, where Neil Jordan said he went his first draft so the reader could see how well or how far he'd come from his intentions. Reading this, I decided to print a script that conformed exactly to what was on screen. This is what I wrote, and while this may seem like a digression, it isn't:

Involving the audience in the steps of the film's progress makes detached experts of everyone, which is a disaster. A scene comes along in a film, and with too much information we're suddenly thinking about the history of the scene, and the film is destroyed until we come back to it. Those directors who participate in the critical dissection of their films by adding outtakes and cut scenes to their laser discs hurt

themselves and hurt their movies. . . . The work becomes something to which the audience is invited to view with superiority, a puzzle to be deciphered, when the work should stand in opposition to its own analysis, and in turn, decipher the viewer. The best books, the best movies, read us, watch us, and as we come to love and understand the work, or even run from it, we discover ourselves. When people talk about interactivity all I can think of is the Roman crowd giving thumbs up or down. The audience does not create, and the propaganda surrounding the supposed interactive future is filled with lies about audience control. It's all pinball, it's just that with the computer you're inside the machine so you don't see the outside of the frame.

I only looked up the word last week, and I was surprised to find that Apocalypse doesn't mean the war at the end of time, it means an uncovering, it means the same thing as Revelation. Without taking a Christian perspective, or perhaps even taking a secularized Christian perspective, and following the thought I expressed in my 3 Screenplays introduction, I want to understand/maintain my old definition of apocalypse while keeping it with the one in the dictionary to form this definition: the disaster is the revelation, not the thing revealed, but the process of revealing, a world of uncovering, a revelation with no special interest in any specific for itself. This is the world with live in now, and it's an inescapable process. The world in which scandal becomes entertainment, the world in which book reviews give more space to non-fiction than fiction. The invented story, which once gave a way to represent privacy has been obliterated by revelation. In Los Angeles, billboards advertise a news hours using photographs of figures in the news over captions presenting them as characters in a story. The recently appointed chief of police is billed as The New Sheriff in town. Madeline Albright gets billed . . . I think as the school marm. In Boston, near the airport, I saw a billboard for a news show, Channel Whatever, Undercover News, we uncover the truth. The entertainment is not the scandal itself, but scandal. An ad in the New Yorker, for an exhibit at the New York Historical Society, Treasures From Mount Vernon, GEORGE WASHINGTON REVEALED. So it is the revelation of Washington, a prurient obsession with the idea of knowing a secret, a romance with the secret.

A question for which I don't quite yet have the answer is this: why is there a confusion between Apocalypse and Millennium, if Apocalypse is Revelation?

We have to look at our own motives. Since I was called by an entertainment journal for my thoughts on the end of the world as a way for a studio to make money, and since I gave advice, and since I have made two films that are directly related to the end of the world, I am not a passive observer of the panic, I add to it. SO do you. You are not observers of the millennium, by reporting on it, by having this conference, you spread the news of the millennial panic, and with it, with your choice of subject, you also spread your own millennial dreams and dread and frenzy. The conference on the millennium increases an edgy awareness. The study of Branch Davidianism is a sect of Branch Davidianism.

Rather than ask each of you, how you came to be interested in your topic, really, I'll ask myself, How did I get this way?

I have from birth attached weight to zero, because I was born in 1950. On my tenth birthday an aunt gave me a present of a briefcase, and a card congratulating me on achieving my first decade. Looking back, that card had a tremendous effect, because I saw my life moving ahead according to the decimal system, in chunks of time, coordinated perfectly with the calendar. It's a small but I don't think unobtrusive part of my character that I imagine that the rest of you, born in the years between the decades, have a different relationship than I do to numbers. I can always figure out how old I'll be in any given year. But if you were born in 1953, how old will you be when you're thirty eight.

I'm sure those of you born in years ending with zero recognize that the decade of your birth, with the redolent aura of that decade, belongs snugly to you. The forties: isn't there a crushed fedora in your aura. The Fifties. The Sixties. Who, born in 1960 does not feel a special twinge when the word sixties appears in print? It's like seeing your name in the phone book, there's an uncontrollable, and rather stupid surge of emotion.

1950 was an especially cool year for birth, because it's the mid-century year. Knowing that I would be fifty in the year 2,000 made getting older a little less unbearable, because the simultaneity of my important birthday and the birth of a new century conferred potency. The future and I had an appointment. In fact, and this is a distressing characteristic of living with the looming millennium, my often unbearable dissatisfaction with life is nothing less than my impatience for that rendezvous. Born at mid-century, I was already half-way there. This a bad way to think about living.

For someone born mid-century, and I will generalize from my specific experience, I faced two competing visions of the future that was always on the horizon, a future that existed on the other side of a singularity, an event of shattering quality. Something would happen, and we would be wiped clean or would be plunged into the shit, there was no middle ground, because that territory was where we already lived, the world of increments, the analog world, not the digital world, not the existence in which we would leap between moments instead of taking the car pool. Now the good future was indistinctly located, but the bad future had a specific date; 1984. This was sufficiently distant, when I first read the book, in 1961 (when I was . . . let's see who's paying attention . . .), to seem impossibly far, a frustratingly long time for Orwell's technical and social apparatus to materialize in Beverly Hills and make the sixth grade just a little more interesting. Because dystopia is also fun, a world of chaos is also imagined as a world better than the incremental world.

The benign future was dateless because it was dependent on the evolution of technology, of which the two great representations appeared as visitations from a time machine: the first was the carousel of Progress in Disneyland, and the second was Expo 67 in Montreal.

The Carousel of Progress Theater was sponsored by General Electric. This is what I remember of the way it worked: "we were brought up a ramp into the back of a small theater, facing the kind of set you'd find in a situation comedy if the show spent its action between the front door, living room, and kitchen. Beginning with a house typical of Disneyland's Main Street period, a group of talking mannequins with a few moveable parts, illuminated as the scene

required, acted out a little puppet show that illustrated how their lives were made bearable by their appliances.

The eponymous Carousel, and the great innovation of the theater, was that the set remained constant while the theater revolved around it. I may be wrong, but I don't think so, and if I am, the difference doesn't change the theory and if it does . . . The home of the future was something like the house of the Jetsons, which, in turn, was probably influenced by the Carousel of Progress. Or more precisely, the Jetsons was the Flintstones living in the last stage of the Carousel of Progress.

The Carousel of Progress was important because it was, more than the Disney/GE film, My Friend the Atom, the most important issue of propaganda from the Entertainment/Industrial Complex; don't forget that General Electric made bombs and nuclear power plants, so the mythology of the Carousel deserves study. No matter what else changed in each diorama, one piece of the story remained the same, which was a kiss between the husband and wife dolls. When they kissed, the wife, whether she was wearing a long dress or a space age pant suit, lifted one foot, bending her knee. This was Disney's and General Electric's promise that human nature was constant and safe, and that the folks at GE took seriously Faulkner's Nobel Acceptance Speech, Man would prevail, to which the rewrite boys added, "by remaining the same". I'm a good rewrite boy, so I know. Hence the Carousel, the wheel of fortune on which all of us are winners. One might say that the pandemic of happy endings in the movies is based on that carousel, because if the essence of a story is that a character start in one place and move to another, then the happy ending returns the character to the starting position, and tragedy becomes a quickly defeated possibility at the end of the second act instead of the end of the third. The Disney Oedipus: "Great news, Jocasta, he wasn't my father, so you're not my mother.

On the other side of the line, the constancy of human nature was not the premise or promise of Expo 67. I hope nobody here was there, so I can be free to make any Goddamn claims I want without contradiction. No, let me rewrite that. Was anybody there? Hands. Good, I won't call on you. So: Expo 67 promised a new human nature, it said that the old human nature was the product precisely of what General Electric was selling, the persistence of old habits in old forms. Expo 67 was the world's fair of a new human future, the end of the nuclear cave dwellers. Expo 67 said that in the future, when we all live in geodesic domes, our architecture will make possible the new humanity. At the entrance to the fair was Habitat, cluster housing for the remade clustering of humanity, a building made of pre-cast forms that could be added onto, for theoretically infinite expansion, a design that made the Carousel of Progress hopelessly square, precisely because of its circularity, its unfortunate despairing vision of a world in which nothing changes but the toys, that suburban circularity which only drug use could shatter.

Expo 67 was the political and corporate world's contribution to the Summer of Love. In June of 1967, within one week I was beaten by police at a demonstration against Lyndon Johnson at the Century City Hotel (Century City . . . meaning, meaning, meaning – meaning it was built on the former back lot of Twentieth Century Fox), and then five days later was at the Monterrey Pop Festival, watching, in one night, The Dead, Janis Joplin, The Who, Jimi Hendrix,

and Otis Redding . . . a night of profound millennial fervor. And I mean that without irony. The world had changed.

So, while a summer like that would have made a young hippie suspicious of the official culture's version of the future, Expo 67 showed the possibility of a harmony that wasn't filled with the insipid and already parodied propaganda of Disneyland, the kind of harmony wished for in Brautigan's poem, when he dreamt "of a cybernetic future/all watched over by machines of loving grace."

Montreal stood as evidence of the Expo's promise, it really was the dream city of this future, proof that cultures could live together, proof that sex could be easy, proof that the future could be invented by the manipulation of forms.

It was also noted then that Expo 67 was a celebration of film, and to the possibilities of film, a melding of Nouvelle Vague, Socialist Realism, and Cinema Verité.

Expo was crowded with films, and in content most of them were what one would have expected in an attempted fulfillment of Expo's theme, of Man and His World; human bounty and possibility, waiting to unfold eternally, save for the threat of nuclear annihilation, which would dissolve with our common joyful effort. It seemed that the cure for the bomb was a world united by the neutrality of Helvetica. The bomb, spawn of Disney and General Electric's Bomb, was held up in a lot of the movies as the great challenge, the bomb that would ruin our fun, the fun we would have perfecting this really neat world of ours. The movies celebrated the ecstasies of life's variety in a blend much too messy for the Carousel living rooms, too much dirt for the robot vacuum cleaners.

But it wasn't just images that mattered, or montage, it was the way the movie were presented that distinguished Expo. Just as the designers of the Carousel of Progress understood that the audience's traditional relationship to the mundane, a position of enforced passivity, was also a position from which detachment could lead to suspicion, cynicism and revolt, so did the designers of Expo make a relationship to film frantic. And don't forget that McLuhan was Canadian (a fact that may have no special meaning but Canadians are so seldom granted the honorific of conspiracy and evil intention that I think it's only fair to make a generalization about them) . . . where was I . . . right . . . so, in a McLuhanist way, the reception of the films was given the same attention as the films themselves. The movies were presented not so often as theater than a moving images watched while moving. Most pavilions gave you film in fragments, as parts of a continuous exhibit, without forcing everyone to sit down. Screens were everywhere, above and below. If the conventional screen and theater were avoided, given all this visual excitement, what was the most popular exhibit at Expo 67, what was the hardest ticket, what took the most pull to see? It was a conventional sex farce in black and white, the film at the Czech Pavilion, shown in the kind of small theater you find in a provincial museum.

I should say, what looked, on first glance, to be a conventional theater. It was not conventional, there were two buttons on the back of each seat, and the film didn't just begin, it was introduced by one of the actors. He came out and explained the use of the buttons. Of course everyone knew going in what was going to happen, that at key moments during the film

we would determine the direction of the story. Should the boyfriend come into the apartment while the girlfriend is with her lover? Should the police catch the thief or should he get away?

I forget everything about that movie except that we voted, and that the entertainment was not the movie, the movie was an excuse to play a game, the movie could have been any story, in the terms of a Hollywood story conference, the places between the beats of the story were all that mattered, the manipulation of conventional story points; it was acknowledgement that in the new world, the evidence of which was Expo 67 itself, our sophistication about story would require a change in the way stories were told, and that as the world became more participatory, either more democratic or more social, we would demand of our story-tellers what we demand of our governments, greater control. Civil rights yielding human rights yielding copyrights.

The audience, to enjoy the terror of sharing in creation, had to behave as any audience in a magic show, and not want to work too hard to learn the secret of how the elephant disappeared, although as part of this age of revelation, there's a magician who was chastised by his fraternity for making of his act the wholesale giving away of the secrets of their trade, making a show of how magic acts work.

Because if we thought too hard about the movie instead of the fun of the entertainment for which the silly sex farce was an excuse, the game would turn into an examination of how many branches had been filmed, and how many stories which seemed to take a new direction had a U-turn built into the next choice, bringing the audience back to where it had chosen not to go.

As I remember . . . I sound like I'm testifying . . . to the best of my convenient memory . . . there was an article in the Montreal press analyzing the film, and how many branches the film could follow, and how, in the end, all the branches were designed to return the story to one of half a dozen different endings. This shouldn't be a surprise, the control over the story was an illusion. My brother remembers that as part of the show, the actor even told us to change our vote, not to be cruel. The interruption wasn't a small joke. It was a crucial part of the real game being played by the forces of power, using the audience as the toy. (Don't forget that in television, the sponsors aren't selling the product to you, the network is selling you to the sponsors.) The film at the Czech Pavilion, the birth of the interactive, was a cruel gimmick, another bullet in the arsenal of the forces of entertainment in their war on free time, giving the audience permission to act out their role as the enemy.

Expo 67, an avatar of the future as elegant as Michael Rennie in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, promised that in the golden future, manipulation of the story would be common. The knee would not always have to bend on cue, and the scene would not have to stop there.

I thought of this two summers ago, when I was invited to speak at the annual Aspen Design Conference, a corporate utopian retreat, because the subject was Hollywood and Design. Participants expecting to hear how Van Nest Polglase's sets for Fred Astaire movies affected Art Deco were brutally disappointed.

The conference organizers had invited computer game creators, screenwriters, directors, architects and amusement park designers. And everyone addressed, independently of each other

but with the kind of agreement that happens when the zeitgeist is spawning, their own aspect of the same question, which was:

Given the computer, where is story going?

And if the year 2000 is the idiot's marker for the millennium, for those of us whose idiocy need miracles that can be duplicated in the lab, then we finally had a rough prognostication for the year of the singularity. The oracles had ruled that computer memory doubles every eighteen months, although that law has been broken, but using it as a rough guide, then sometime around the year 2027, as I remember, or it might have been 2021 or 2031, the Pentium's great great great grand child will contain as many circuits as the human brain. And eighteen months after that, doubled, and then doubled again, and double again, and doubled again.

One of the most interesting speakers was a Disney Imagineer, who had great faith in the human need for story telling, but little faith in the continuance of traditional story telling, and he projected his own scenario, vaguely, either because he was venturing into fiction himself, or, and this is also a possibility, he had to be vague to protect Disney research and patents.

He projected competing visions of the possibilities of that future.

In the future happiest for Disney shareholders, story telling, utilizing a – well, I would say an unimaginably powerful computer but it's not unimaginable . . . using this computer, entertainment will take the model of the theme park and deliver it to us as felt experience. The elaborate fun house Disney has built to go along with some theaters showing A Bug's Life is the three dimensional model of what would be, in this scenario, the dream of virtual reality, but even that idea only expresses a way station on the road to a form of entertainment of which no panelist at the design conference would venture a specific description, anymore than Jane Austen, at a conference on the novel, on hearing of the movies, could have said, Yes, I see it clearly, we're heading for The Bride of Chucky. What is the comedy of manners when human society has neither real time nor real property?

Slapstick and horror. It's Chaplin meets The Night Of The Living Dead. (That's such a rich idea I'm not going to let anyone leave this room until the script is written and the copyright registered. There's a funny little Tramp who's a serial killer, see, and you like him because he doesn't eat his victims, he eats their shoes!)

Reading Guy Debord's Society of the Spectacle, and putting his analysis against the design conference, we can see how right the situationalists were. As free time has become consumable time, daily life degenerates to a pseudo cyclical time, the Carousel again, but this is Disney's future, remember, and this pseudo cyclical time is the consumable disguise of the commodity-time of production. It contains the essential properties of consumable time, namely, exchangeable homogenous units and the suppression of the qualitative dimension. But being the by-product of this time which aims to retard concrete daily life and to keep it retarded, these stories, or the corporate stories using thjs technology, have to appear in a sequence of falsely individualized moments; those moments in which the story is given to us to play with.

At the conference I was convinced that though we might wish to think we're closer to Poe, or even Kafka, in relationship to the future worshipped by the apostles of Intel, I believe we're as far from that future as Austen. Melville, Poe, Kafka, James Whale, Hitchcock, and George Romero describe a world in which consciousness goes mad with the loss of Eden, which makes them all sentimentalists. If this Disney future comes true, we will have a form of communication indistinguishable from consciousness as we now imagine it, a consciousness that from the beginning of human awareness forms the basis for story telling, a consciousness contained in this body, something that badly wants contact with other consciousnesses and other bodies, and even contact with God, that fails and succeeds at all three forms of contact, in a rhythm of experience that is sometimes beautiful, joyful and pleasant and sometimes terrible. Perhaps Phillip K. Dick, who describes a madness more frightening for the absence of a reference for something better understands this.

This form of entertainment would be the annihilation of time, which is what we are already witnessing, so crudely. Remember Dick's *The Man In The High Castle*, his novel about the results of World War Two which saw the Allies lose to the Axis, an America colonized by the Germans in the East and Japanese in the West, where, in San Francisco, there is a great industry in counterfeit Disney collectibles.

Like the interactive branching of the Czech Pavilion's film, we might suffer the illusion of some control over the story, but no story could branch infinitely. For practical reasons – which means economics and social stability supported and justified by law and theology, that form of story telling, like all amusement park rides, and all tourism, would have to return the viewer to the starting point, otherwise the viewer, waking up, would be different, and in his difference, unmanageable. I need to emphasize this again: corporate story telling is a weapon.

Without a return to the starting point, anyone subjected to truly original stories delivered by this new system, stories with no guaranteed ending would leave whatever the appliance the television had become deranged and dangerous.

There would have to be laws regulating the rules of story telling, laws based on the principles of drama laid down by the screenwriting gurus of this era, who have cracked the genetic code of the successful film, and have catalogued the formulae.

The genetic code of the successful story has been cracked, or is cracking, just as the human genome project is working. The machinery of investigation into physical systems has corollaries in mass entertainment, and I believe this to be an essential piece of Revelation, and Apocalypse.

The dramatic story which leaves you different will be the outlawed story, not pornography. After all, porn is everywhere now. There's a ghetto for independent film, which is usually so unimaginative that it offers no serious threat, and might be tolerated as a convenient way to distract the bohemians instead of killing them.

The future of commercial story telling is evidence around us, more like a ride than a novel because the ride and its cousin, the movie, are the product of a group and the novel, so far, is still the work of one. I was in a meeting once with a Disney executive who complained that the rules of theater, the contractual rules, prevented the studio from producing plays, because in the theater the writer has too much contractual power and the writer owns the copyright. He said that theater would be better if it too went through the development mill. The enemy, as always, is the individual.

There was another side to the Disney argument. With such chips there was, depending on perspective, the opportunity or danger that the super chip would allow up and downloading of consciousness through the internet so freely that the great entertainment combines would collapse as anyone could get into the game. This is the hippie utopian vision. Considering the speed at which the internet was colonized by the stock market, I don't think this vision has much of a chance. But assume it does, for argument. With the internet as enabler of transmission of experience and feeling, in a new form of story-telling, we could have the ultimate realization of a Tolstoyan ideal of art, the one he defined in *What Is Art*, that art is the transmission of one person's feelings to another. *While we cannot imagine what form this would take, we can guess that there might be a sublime linking of people that would be something like sex and that Ninth Symphony rolled into the womb.*

No one followed this thought to an obvious implication of a humanity connected emotionally, in this undefined but perhaps unmediated way, through the web sites of pure feeling and imagery. Remember, you are not looking at this with your eyes anymore, you are plugging into something. Would the site with the strongest feelings and images win, and if so, would that be the Devil or the Messiah? My conditional tense should be changed. Will the site with the strongest feelings and images win, and if so, will that site be the devil or the Messiah. Now do I sound like a Rooster?

Perhaps panelists' inability to really follow through on the democratic/religious implications of their projects should have been no surprise; these panelists were all the vanguard shock troops of capitalism, struggling to see money in the ultimate entertainment machine that gives the illusion of freedom in the electronic empire of absolute slavery to the image. Their concern was the idea of the story, they knew that story was something essential to humanity, and they also knew that the corporate invasion of the idea of the story was the most significant purchase they could make on the future. So it was that the architect of the City Walk at Universal described his work, as story telling.

I don't know how many of you have been to the City Walk, which is a street at Universal that could be termed just another Mall, but there's something more going on, as the architect explained. He saw himself as a story teller, as someone delivering what movies deliver, which is experience and sensation, and this, to him, was more than just a fancy way of saying that he was decorating a standard mall with neon and movie posters, he saw his work as following the emotional power of story telling, one might say that this was closer to a musical idea of a symphony as a story that it was to a writer's idea of a story. He also saw his work as recreating the kind of community he knew as a child, when his father was an accountant for carnivals. The

carnival is the essence of future entertainment, con game and thrill ride, dependent on electricity, and run by people who create a feeling of human possibility and then abandon it.

An entertainment of pure feeling might also be made out of living someone's experiences without suffering certain consequences: you could feel the electric chair without dying yourself. The Apocalypse and Revelation would be the uncovering of another person's feelings, at the deepest level, purely for the experience of those feelings, without sympathy, unless sympathy was they feeling you were stealing, for lack of you own.

What does it mean when the corporations of culture anticipate the end of story? It's an easy attack on Hollywood to rip the system for telling inhuman stories, but let me suggest that what we might agree are human stories are almost impossible to tell now, in the movies. We cannot tell too much of the truth of our private lives, those moments spent in the gaps between work and our submission to entertainment. *Time no longer exists as luxury, in the way that luxury no longer exists.*

That's a digression . . . Truth and story . . . Story comes because we need our truths, all truths, especially the truths of our dreams and fantasies, and also the truths of our ideas, the drama inherent in our theologies, represented graphically and abstractly. For the entertainment/industrial complex to hire architecture to take over from story telling, or to hire architecture to assume some of story telling's functions may reflect that the entertainment/industrial complex foresees the exhaustion of the genres that have kept the complex alive.

The entertainment/industrial complex now uses more computer power than the nuclear weapons industry. As I said earlier, it's the great benefit of not being an academic that I can pass along without proof what I heard in the hallways at Industrial Light and Magic, and at Digital Domain. This brings us to an echo of the birth of the movie, which owed some of its technology to the early machine gun. Not from nowhere is it called shooting a movie.

Where I want to go from here takes a bit of a leap. So, follow me.

I moderated a panel at the conference, sitting between another screenwriter and a producer, and we talked about the advent of the blockbuster film. Another term, of course, stolen from war. As sometimes happens, I had prepared an introduction, but left out a crucial though, because I didn't have my trusty copy of Adorno's *Minima Moralia* at hand. Now I do.

"Some years ago," writes Adorno, in chapter 74 of his book, "American newspapers announced the discovery of a well-preserved dinosaur in the state of Utah. It was stressed that the specimen had survived its kind and was millions of years younger than those previously known. Such pieces of news, like the repulsive humoristic craze for the Loch Ness Monster and the King Kong film, are collective projections of the monstrous total State. People prepare themselves for its terrors by familiarizing themselves with gigantic images. In its absurd readiness to accept these, impotently prostrate humanity tries desperately to assimilate to experience what defies all experience."

The question I was going to turn to the audience was this, and perhaps the Eco quote and the Landes version of that quote can be amended to this: Every millennial audience gets the apocalyptic film it needs. Every apocalyptic film takes a basic fear, the fear of the historical moment, and tries to resolve it in fantasy. So let's take King Kong, Frankenstein, and Jurassic Park. What is the enemy of humanity in Frankenstein, what force represents the advent of a new terror? It's not dead bodies, it's science, yes? Good. This holds true for Jurassic Park, a story about how the primitive cannot be contained, and that the more we advance into the future, the more likely will the tools of that advance release ancient malevolence, and yet! we need not worry because the problem with the system is the programmer, not the system, and with the right people, and so on.

But King Kong is different. What in King Kong is the enemy? What mistake was made? The mistake in Frankenstein was . . . anybody? . . .

Igor came back with a murderer's brain.

The mistake in Jurassic Park?

Wasn't there something in the amber, something wrong?

So in both stories, there's an implied movie that would have been dull, had the experiments succeeded, Frankenstein's monster with a good brain might have yielded a novel of poetic beauty. Jurassic Park with no mistakes is a boring screen saver. Both stories need corruption, without it, neither movie would have been made.

Again, where does King Kong fit?

(hum the Jeopardy theme)

As somebody pointed out to me, I forget where, why did the villagers make a door big enough for the monster when they already had a wall big enough to hold him back? Why didn't they have a big wall and teeny tiny door. Oh, it's conundra like that that makes me miss marijuana.

Why does the ship go to the island? For science?

No.

They go to make a movie.

What do they do to Kong that insults his dignity?

They put him on a nightclub stage.

What makes him go insane?

They take his picture.

What big neon sign hangs from the walls near the entrance to City Walk?

Kong himself.

Adorno, and this was rare of him, was wrong. He didn't look closely enough at the message of the film.

As I said, I was interested in finding a way to make sense of the popular notion of Apocalypse with the definition in my old dictionary. So back to apocalyptic films.

The formulation that suggests that a Total State will follow the disaster movie misses the more frightening possibility that the disaster movie is the Total State of Panic. The camera was Kong's enemy not because the camera captures images, but because the camera has been claimed as the weapon of truth. We Go Undercover to Bring You The Truth With Our Cameras. King Kong was not the Apocalypse, King Kong was the first victim of the Apocalypse.

This is the Apocalypse. Right now, here. Even what I'm saying. I have no doubt I'm right, but being right, participating in a revelation, I am committing the sin of Apocalypse.

The search for the secret is the sin, and a culture in search of secrets, a culture sure that secrets exist, is . . . the culture we live in.

What did we say yesterday, that the coat of arms for the new millennium is a turkey and a bat? And it's interesting that the bat was chosen as the emblem of historical knowledge, because that brings us to the horror myth I couldn't otherwise place in my scheme; Dracula, the Vampire.

The Vampire story tells us this, that the disaster already happened. The dead are walking all around us. The bombs have fallen. The vampires, agents of the carnival, bleed us night and day.

And this is as far as I've gotten.

How to continue?

Now it says, put the paper down and try to organize a happier thought. So I'll try.

The total state doesn't need to waste its time trying to force everyone to obey, it doesn't have to force use because we go along without a gun to our head most of the time, anyway.

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Thank you.