SF as Film Genre (1895-1960s)

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1. Awakenings of SF Cinema: the Proto-SF Film

According to Gregg Rickman, "As such, sf scarcely existed before the 19th Century, and as a specific, commercially viable genre, not until the rise of the sf pulps of the 1920s" (xiv). Still according to Rickman,

> Movies took longer – science fiction was not recognized as a commercial film genre by the Hollywood film industry until after 1950. After peaking in popularity in the 1950s, and declining in the early 1960s, the form resurged creatively in the later 1960s, and commercially in the later 1970s. For a quarter century since the release of both *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in 1977, science fiction has been Hollywood's dominant genre, spinning off blockbuster after blockbuster as showcases, in particular, for the latest special effects. (xiv)

Nevertheless, some SF elements in an embryonic state can be seen in films dating back as early as the invention of the cinematographer. Already in the Silent Era, and still in the 19th Century, a 'proto-science fiction cinema' began to appear, in which we can identify the embryo of a genre that would later become the science fiction (SF) cinema of today. This prototypical form of SF production was deeply diluted by the broader context of fantasy films, making it even more difficult to distinguish between the two at the time.

In this sense then and from a retrospective viewpoint, the Lumière Brothers' 1895 film *The Mechanical Butcher* (*La charcuterie méchanique*) could be classified as one of the first proto-science fiction films - prototypes because, at least before the 1930s, the term science fiction had not yet reached the necessary circulation to rename the literary genres already known as Extraordinary Voyages (*Voyages Extraordinaires*), Scientific Romance (*Roman Scientifique*) and, later, scientifiction.

In *La charcutérie méchanique*, a short film made up of only one shot, a pig is inserted in a machine that automatically provides sausages. The film was likely exhibited in reverse as well. According to Mark Bould,

> The first twenty years of sf cinema were dominated by similar one-reel trick movies which exploited the basic special effects made possible by undercranking the camera, split screens, dissolves, stop-motion and reversed footage. Such narratives as these films possessed hinged on X-rays, elixirs, giant insects, flying bicycles, hair-

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MLA Citation of this article:
Suppia, Alfredo. "SF as Film Genre (1895-1960s)." *A Virtual Introduction to Science Fiction*. Ed. Lars Schmeink. Web. 2012. <http://virtual-sf.com/?page_id=336>. 1-17.

> restoring tonics, supercars, dirigibles, invisibility and the mysterious powers of electricity, magnetism and monkey glands. (79)

As was usual at the time, *La Charcuterie* inspired a series of imitations in Europe and the US. The borders between documentary and proto-science fiction were rather thin at that moment. Exhibitors were free to select and organize film rolls to be projected in the order they wished, and this had an influence on the films' reception. Documentary, educational or promotional films could be shown among fiction films, something that altered the way in which spectators experienced these different genres.

Taking into account the publication of H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* in parallel to the première of the Lumière cinematographer in 1895, we can see that film and modern science fiction literature were born around the same period. Shortly after, in France, the magician-filmmaker Georges Méliès made *Gugusse and the Robot* (*Gugusse et l'automaton*), a comedy about an android, and *The American Surgeon* (*Cirurgien americain*), a comedy about organ transplantation, both in 1897. In 1901, Ferdinand Zecca directed *À la conquête de l'air*, in which a heroic inventor pilots a flying machine. Later, Méliès went on to make films such as *A Trip to the Moon* (*Le voyage dans la lune*, 1902) and *An Impossible Voyage* (*Le voyage à travers l'impossible*, 1904), both inspired by Jules Verne's and H. G. Wells' books. Phil Hardy celebrates Méliès as a pioneering filmmaker and the true 'father' of science fiction cinema:

> Looking back to those days from the present, and literally excavating the beginnings of the Science Fiction film, it is easy to see Science Fiction elements in the numerous trick films of the period. But set against those simple films, most of which, like the Lumière brothers *Charcuterie Méchanique* (1895) and Ferdinand Zecca's *À la Conquête de l'Air* (1901), were comic in intent and lasted only a minute or two, Georges Méliès's *Le Voyage dans La Lune* (1902) was a landmark in the history of the cinema, as much for its sophisticated narrative and epic length as for its subject matter which was derived from Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. Méliès's film marks the real beginnings of the Science Fiction cinema. Where other film-makers had been content to poke fun at the new and emerging technologies of the 20th Century – X-rays, air flight, electricity, the motorcar – Méliès created a Science Fiction story and, in the process, identified the theme of space travel which became one of the abiding themes of the genre. Other directors isolated other themes and began to elaborate upon them, thus moulding the genre, but it was Méliès who laid its foundation. (18)

According to the Brazilian film critic Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, "the Spaniard Segundo de Chomón, one of the most skillful artisans of the Early Cinema, could have been a rival for Méliès and Zecca" (162). With a career in France, Chomón also directed interesting proto-science fiction films like *El Hotel Eléctrico* (1908), an 8-minute short produced by Pathé, in which a couple (with Chomón himself as the husband) are guests in a fully automated, high-tech hotel.

Along with Méliès and Zecca, Chomón composed what we could call the first triumvirate for fantasy film in the Silent Era (cf. Salles Gomes 162) – three key-filmmakers pioneering in fantasy cinema.

However, it is also worth mentioning the English filmmakers Walter R. Booth and J. Stuart Blackton, the latter with a career in the US. In England, Walter Booth directed *The '?' Motorist*, a 1906 movie in which a high speed magical car, which is able to climb buildings and go through the rings of Saturn, transports a couple into space. Booth is also the director of *The Airship Destroyer* (1909), a British film produced by Charles Urban and based on the work of Jules Verne. According to John Baxter, this film about a future war fought by bomber zeppelins is "probably the first film which deserves to be considered as true science fiction" (16). The success of *The Airship Destroyer* inspired other British productions such as *The Aerial Anarchists* (1911) and David Aylott and A. E. Coleby's *The Pirates of 1920* (1911). Phil Hardy notes that

> Méliès's fantastic voyages were supplanted by less imaginative but more directly compelling scenarios, such as those of the future war sub-genre, which made its first appearance with Walter Booth's *Airship Destroyer* (1909). Films of this type, which included *England's Menace*, *An Englishman's Home*, *Wake Up!* And *If England were Invaded*, all of which were completed in 1914, when the possibility under imagination was a probability, touched real fears with their "what if England were invaded" scenarios. (18)

In 1910, the passage of Halley's comet inspired the first science fiction disaster movie, *The Comet*, produced by the American company Kalem, director unknown. In the following years, some serials starring 'scientific detectives' started appearing in the US, such as *The Exploits of Elaine* (1914), directed by Louis Gasnier and George Seitz, and *Lady Baffles and Detective Duck* (1915), directed by Allen Curtis. These 'scientific detectives' or 'high-tech spy-films' had a role in the beginnings of SF cinema and gradually delineated a trend –one which would be expanded and improved by the work of directors such as Fritz Lang, much later culminating in the James Bond films.

Since Méliès, science fiction cinema has found an inexhaustible source of inspiration in literature. Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) inspired uncountable adaptations throughout the history of film, as well as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). The first probable film adaptation of *Frankenstein* was produced by Edison Co. in 1910, written and directed by J. Searle Dawley – approximately 21 years before the most notable (and perhaps loosest) adaptation of Shelley's novel, directed by James Whale, with Boris Karloff as the creature. Likewise, the first time *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* came to the silver screen was probably in 1910, in August Blom's Danish short film (*Den skæbnesvangre op-*

findelse) with Alwin Neuß in the role of Dr. Jekyll. Later, in 1920, Stevenson's novel appeared in the US as a feature film: John S. Robertson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, starring John Barrymore as both the scientist and the 'monster'. All these adaptations, however, were more strongly influenced by theatrical adaptations rather the original novels.

It is also important to mention that German cinema exerted a remarkable influence on science fiction, fantasy and horror film from the late 1910s onwards. A good example of German film production in the field during this period is Otto Rippert's series *Homunculus* (1916). John Baxter observes that "Experiments in sf film carried on in England, America, Denmark and France are only marginally reflected in the sf cinema of today, but the work then being done in Germany has left an indelible mark on modern film" (21). According to Phil Hardy,

> In America the new emphasis on narrative, speed and increased characterization transformed notions of the Science Fiction film, as well as film in general. In Europe too, the simple dramas or trick photography and fantastic happenings of earlier times developed along more sophisticated lines. Films like *Der Golem* (1914), *Verdens Untergang* and *Homunculus* (both 1916) were far more sombre than anything produced at the time in America. This is especially true of Fritz Lang's *Die Spinnen* (1919) which, […] is far darker in tone than its American counterparts. It was this growing divergence of American and European notions of what cinema was and what it could do that shaped the Science Fiction cinema of the twenties. (18)

2. The 1920s

Mark Bould highlights the emergence of several films and series with 'mad scientists' during this period, films like *A Blind Bargain* (1922), directed by Wallace Worsley and starring Lon Chaney, or Henrik Galeen's *Alraune* (1928), an adaptation of Hanns Heinz Ewers's novel. In early 1920s France, René Clair presented a Paris frozen in time in *Paris Qui Dort* (1923), a film about an eccentric scientist and his wonderful invention: a device capable of stopping the flow of time. Two years later, *L'Inhumaine* (1925) presented a melodrama about an extravagant killer and opera star, who is revived by the machines of a scientist admirer. The film benefited from "the talents of painter Fernand Léger to create a *mise-en-scène* derived mainly from the geometrical artificiality of cubism" (Baxter 18).

Soviet cinema produced at least one remarkable SF movie in the 1920s: Yakov Protazanov's *Aelita* (1924), based on Alexei Tolstoy's homonymous book, is an epic novelization of the Russian Revolution, here exported to Mars with scenery and costumes inspired by the Constructivist movement. Still in the Soviet Union, Lev Kuleshov directed *The Death Ray* (*Luch Smerti*, 1925), a melodrama pamphlet in which the hero employs a kind of laser against a bombing raid by the fascists.

In the 1920s, Germany strengthened its contribution to the future of science fiction cinema with fundamental experiments. Hans Werkmeister's *Algol* (1920) explores the antagonism between the worlds of magic and technology in his 'interstellar romance'. The motif of organ transplant gained momentum with Robert Wiene's *The Hands of Orlac* (*Orlacs Hände*, 1925), about a pianist who, after an accident, receives hands transplanted from a suspected murderer. But perhaps the greatest author for science fiction film in the Silent Era is Fritz Lang, director of the famous *Metropolis* (1927). A super-production, the film took nearly two years to be completed, *Metropolis* is a true synthesis of modernity, marking a period in which proto-science fiction film began to discover its own specific identity.

In 1929, Lang directed *The Woman in the Moon* (*Die Frau im Mond*, 1929), a mixture of melodrama and documentary-style prophecy, which had valuable advice from specialists in astronautics Hermann Oberth and Willy Ley. However, in spite of all its technical advisory, the film was criticized for some 'scientific flaws'. An example of Fritz Lang's concern with realism, *The Woman in the Moon* anticipated typical situations of space exploration, such as 'zero gravity' and the countdown procedure.

3. The 1930s

Mad scientists and comic book heroes seem to give the tone for science fiction film in the 1930s. Phil Hardy comments that

> In Europe, films like *La Fin du Monde* (1930), Abel Gance's overblown disaster epic, *F.P.1* [*Doesn't Answer*] *Antwortet Nicht* (1932), a technological vision of the near future, and *Things to Come* (1936), a spectacular dressing up of H.G. Wells's austere vision of the far future, in their various ways continued the line of prophetic speculation of *Metropolis* (1926). […] In America, however, after the false start of *Just Imagine* (1930) and the even odder *It's Great to be Alive* (1933) there was no clear line of development. (82)

The lost world motif inspired film productions such as G. W. Pabst's *L'Atlantide* (1932), an adaptation of the novel by Pierre Benoit (*L'Atlantide*, 1919) which was in turn inspired by H. Rider Haggard's *She* (1886-7) (cf. Baxter 78-80). Disasters that devastate the planet appear in films like Abel Gance's aforementioned *La Fin du Monde* (1930), or Felix Feist's *American Deluge* (1933).

According to Mark Bould, the dominant form taken in the 1930s was the "mad scientist" movie (83). In this sense, it is not surprising that even in Argentina, already in 1932, one of the first proto-science fiction films was C. Z. Soprani's *El Hombre Bestia o las Aventuras del Capitán Richard*. In this film, Captain Richard's aircraft crashes in a forest, he survives and becomes a kind of savage

until falling into the hands of a mad scientist who turns him into a sexually violent monster. Still in the Latin American context, the first Mexican film capable of association with the universe of science fiction debuts in 1935: Gabriel Soria's *Deadmen Speak* (*Los Muertos Hablan*), about a scientist who steals corpses and uses them in experiments (cf. Paz 83).

The most famous adaptation of Mary Shelley's novel was released by Universal in the US in 1931. Partially influenced by Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, James Whale's *Frankenstein* established some image references that would later become deeply associated with the original story. Boris Karloff's performance – the actor who gave the creature a striking face with the support of sophisticated makeup by Jack Pierce –, was perhaps the film's most effective contribution. The 1931 *Frankenstein* establishes elements, which are not in the original novel but nonetheless influenced many subsequent productions. These elements include the expressionist-inspired visual style, the character of the assistant, the paraphernalia of the laboratory, explicit references to electricity and the motif of an abnormal brain. Whale continued to direct science fiction or monster movies at Universal Studios, such as *The Invisible Man* (1933), adapted from the novel by H. G. Wells, and *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) – a sequel to his own *Frankenstein,* which was largely thought to outdo the original.

Meanwhile, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* had its most famous adaptation released in 1932, directed by Rouben Mamoulian. Fredric March won an Oscar for his portrayal of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in this technically sophisticated film. In 1933, Erle C. Kenton's *Island of Lost Souls* adapted H. G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, originally published in 1896. Also in 1933, RKO launched the ancestor of the supermonster film, Merian Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack's *King Kong*, which displays a wonderful special effects job by Willis O'Brien and a team of experts.

Germany continued to produce SF like Karl Hartl's aforementioned *FP1 Doesn't Answer* (*FP1 Antwortet Nicht* (1933), a film about a 'flying' aircraft carrier operating over the Atlantic, with special effects by Günther Rittau and screenplay by Curt Siodmak. Triumphs of engineering inspired films like Curtis Bernhardt's *Der Tunnel* (1933), released in German and French versions, about the challenge of building a mega-tunnel under the Atlantic Ocean. In the Soviet Union, science fiction experiments continued with films like Aleksei Andreievsky's *Gibel Sensaty* (in the U.S., *Loss of Feeling*, 1935), an adaptation of the famous play *Rossum's Universal Robots* (*R.U.R.*, 1921) by the Czech writer Karel Capek.

One of the most famous productions from 1930s science fiction cinema – for some the Wellsian decade for SF film – is certainly *Things to Come* (1936), an adaptation of H. G. Wells' novel *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) directed by William Cameron Menzies. The horror of war and the challenges of techno-

logical utopia are central themes in this 1936 British production, written by Mr. Wells himself, who also intensely participated in the making of the movie. For Wells everything in the film was to be exactly the opposite of what Fritz Lang did in *Metropolis*.

Finally, Mark Bould observes that the only genuinely modern films in the period were probably British avant-garde shorts like *The Birth of a Robot* (1935), by Len Lye, and *Equation: x + x = 0* (1936), by Robert Fairthorne and Brian Salt (cf. 80). Bould also recalls the remarkable momentum in the 1930s towards the production of film series (cf. 84). In this regard, it is worth noting Frederick Stephani's *Flash Gordon* (1936), an adaptation of Alex Raymond's famous comic, and Ford Beebe and Saul Goodkind's *Buck Rogers* (1939), originating from Dick Calkins's comic hero. These two movie series are notable examples of the popular appeal of space operas and the increasing intersection between film and comics articulated by SF.

4. The 1940s

Phil Hardy suggests that science fiction was somehow eclipsed in the cinema of the 1940s. According to him,

> The contrasting developments of Science Fiction literature and the Science Fiction film which were a feature of the thirties continued into the fourties. In the magazines, still the genre's creative focus, the beginning of modern Science Fiction were erected on the foundations laid down in the thirties, but in the cinema Science Fiction as such hardly existed. Various Science Fiction elements already existed, but they still awaited cohesive themes to form the centrepiece of the solid genre that would appear, as if from nowhere in the fifties. (106)

Hence, the 1940s were not scene for major SF film productions, possibly because of World War II and its outcomes. Phil Hardy observes that "the horror cycle of the thirties (which had annexed many Science Fiction elements) turned to parody; indeed, in the U.S. it climaxed in the broad farce of *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948)" (106), while giant reptiles were the stars of Hal Roach and Hal Roach Jr.'s *One Million Years BC* (1940). Size matters, so human miniaturization was the Pandora's box in Ernest B. Schoedsack's *Dr. Cyclops* (1940), a film in which the mad scientist Dekker performs experiments in his laboratory in the midst of the Peruvian jungle.

Meanwhile, in countries like Brazil and Mexico, science fiction started appearing on the silver screen via comedic films notably in the 1940s. The first Brazilian comedy framed by science fiction was probably Silveira Sampaio's *An Adventure at 40* (*Uma Aventura aos 40*). Released in 1947, this film tells the life story of a

professor honored by a TV show in 1975. In this future television, interactivity is a full-fledged technology: the spectator can talk directly to the TV presenter. In Mexico, Jaime Salvador's 1946 film *The Modern Bluebeard* (*El Moderno Barba Azul*, 1946) had already combined science fiction and comedy, with Buster Keaton playing the main character who gets involved in multiple mix-ups only to end up boarding a rocket bound for the Moon. Another example of Mexican SF comedy is Miguel M. Delgado's *The Superwiseman* (*El Supersabio*, 1948), starring Mario Moreno (a.k.a. Cantinflas) as the assistant of a brilliant scientist, the inventor of a valuable elixir.

In Czechoslovakia, Otakar Vavra directed *Krakatik* (1949), an adaptation of a story by classic Czech author Karel Capek. The film narrates the moral fable of the scientist Prokop (Karel Hoeger), who discovers a new explosive he calls Krakatik.

It is also worth mentioning the sequels to James Whale's *Frankenstein* and *Bride of Frankenstein*, such as Erle C. Kenton's *The Ghost of Frankenstein* (1942) and others, and Victor Fleming's version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1941), a subtler remake of Rouben Mamoulian's film from the 1930s starring Spencer Tracy and Ingrid Bergman.

Finally, we must mention the continuous appearance of superheroes from the comics, such as in Ford Beebe's *Flash Gordon Conquers the Universe* (1940), William Witney and John English's *The Adventures of Captain Marvel* (1940) and *Dick Tracy versus Crime Inc.* (1941), Lambert Hillyer's *Batman* (1942), and John English and Elmer Clifton's *Captain America* (1944), among others.

5. The 1950s

Science fiction cinema is reborn in the 1950s. According to Phil Hardy,

> The fifties was the decade in which anxiety, paranoia and complacency marched hand in hand. On the threshold of space, man had discovered and used a force so frightening that it could mean the extinction of the species. The world only so recently saved for democracy was once again divided, this time by an Iron Curtain and in America subversion from within became a prevalent fear. These anxieties, expressed and explored in a variety of ways created the Science Fiction film genre. Few of the movies were masterpieces, yet a surprising number of fifties Science Fiction films retain their power and resonance to this day, however banal they stand revealed in retrospect. (124)

The 1950s set the stage for the famous SF film boom in the US, sparked by films like Kurt Neumann's *Rocketship XM* (1950), but especially Irving Pichel's *Destination Moon* (1950), an ambitious production by George Pal based on Robert A. Heinlein's novel *Rocketship Galileo* (1947) – both released in America in 1950.

Describing a space adventure to conquer Earth's natural satellite, *Destination Moon* re-edits Fritz Lang's formula for *The Woman in the Moon*, but now within the explicit ideological framework of American liberalism. A notably pedagogical movie in terms of narrative, *Destination* is one of the most scientifically detailed SF films of its time, largely due to the scientific advice of Willy Ley and the conceptual illustrations by Chesley Bonnestel, who designed lunar landscapes for the sets. Released in 1955, Byron Haskin's *Conquest of Space*, "a colorful combination of pseudo-documentary and Mars exploration flick, […] was producer George Pal's uneven attempt to rework his highly successful *Destination Moon* formula" (Gerani 16).

In the wake of *Destination*, Cold War, alien invasion and nuclear holocaust motifs became dominant in the American SF cinema of the period. This can be seen in titles like: *The Thing from Another World* (1951), Howard Hawks's production which was inspired by John Campbell Jr.'s short story "Who Goes There?"; Robert Wise's *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), in which aliens give an ultimatum to mankind; Joseph Newman's *This Island Earth* (1955) featuring nuclear scientists from Earth who are involved in atomic warfare between planets Metaluna and Zaghon; Don Siegel's *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), a movie about a silent alien invasion that can be read both as an anti-communist allegory and "a criticism of placid conformity to American Cold War ideology" (Buckland 98f.); and Gene Fowler Jr.'s *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958), with another alien invasion threatening the sacred family unit.

According to Warren Buckland, "The science fiction film of the 1950s shares some of the paranoia and insecurities of the *film noir*" (87). Buckland cites Robert Aldrich's *Kiss me Deadly* (1955) as a key example, a film that combines attributes from both the *noir* and science fiction genres.

Buckland also mentions Gordon Douglas's *Them!* (1954) and Rudolph Maté's *When Worlds Collide* (1951) as good examples of the 1950s science fiction films' fear that, "for the first time in history, mankind is able to destroy itself, by means of its own science and technology. […] Such films can therefore be read as reflecting the anxieties of the American public in the 1950s" (98), the fear of extinction brought on by a nuclear fallout.

For many writers and SF fans, the greatest American 1950s science fiction film premiered in 1956: Fred M. Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet*, a loose adaptation of William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. This thought-provoking film brings psychoanalysis into SF cinema, exploring subjects from Freud's theories about the unconscious.

According to Mark Bould, the SF film boom in the early 1950s would have ran out quickly (cf. 85), if there had not been the revival of monster movies driven by the re-release of *King Kong* (1952), paving the way for productions like Eugène

Lourie's *The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* (1953), based on Ray Bradbury short story "The Fog Horn", or Gordon Douglas's *Them!* (1954), in which giant ants mutated by radiation threaten the US.

But among many names (Pichel, Wise, Siegel, Juran, Lourié, Maté and others) of filmmakers of the 1950s boom, perhaps the most important one was Jack Arnold, the prolific director of some of the most representative films of the period, such as *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (1954), *Revenge of the Creature* (1955), *Tarantula* (1955), *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) and *The Space Children* (1958). Some of these titles can be considered masterpieces of the genre. According to Mark Bould "Arnold's evocations of the possibilities inherent in a landscape without figures brought lyricism to a frequently bland-looking genre" (86). After the films of Jack Arnold, the swamp, the desert, and even the American middle-class home have not been seen in the same way.

In the UK, there was also an interesting science fiction filmography in the same period, which, according to authors such as I. Q. Hunter (1999), covered both low-budget productions (the famous B-movies) and films that tried to emulate American SF flicks. Originating in television, the Quatermass series is nonetheless representative of the 'alien paranoia' in British cinema, starting in the 1950s with *The Quatermass Xperiment* (1955) and lasting until the fourth episode in the late 1970s (*The Quatermass Conclusion*, 1978). The famous British sense of humour also contributed to science fiction in Alexander Mackendrick's *The Man in the White Suit* (1951), a clever SF comedy starring Alec Guinness.

By this time, mad scientists and their unpredictable experiments were a worldwide phenomenon; so it is also worth remembering that, as early as 1951, Argentine cinema presented a daring adaptation of Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: *El Extraño Caso del Hombre y la Bestia*, directed by Mario Soffici.

Japan also produced a significant crop of science fiction cinema in the 1950s, especially the 'radioactive monster films' (*kaiju eiga*) inaugurated by Ishiro Honda's *Godzilla* (*Gojira*, 1954) – the first appearance of the giant dinosaur awakened by alarming American nuclear tests. Honda, also the director of the space opera *The Mysterians* (*Chikyu Boeigun*, 1957), was probably the greatest name of Japanese SF cinema at the time.

In Mexican science fiction cinema, Ítala Schmelz, Vania Rojas and Héctor Orozco note that "in the mid-1950s, the humorous potential of fantastic adventures was discovered and the comedians are launched, one after another, in large intergalactic adventures" (n.pag.). By the end of the 1950s, Mexican cinema offered titles such as the Aztec Mummy series, beginning with Rafael Portillo's *Aztec Mummy vs. the Human Robot* (*La Momia azteca contra el robot humano*, 1958),

about a scientist who builds a robot to steal the treasure guarded by an Aztec mummy.

In the late 1950s, American SF cinema survived with low-budget productions aimed at a youthful audience. Directing lean and resourceful films such as *Teenage Caveman* (1958), Roger Corman became the big name at the time, paving the way for a more explicit reconciliation between science fiction and horror movies (cf. Bould 86). Menaces from outer space – in the spirit of the Cold War era – continued to appear in films like William Cameron Menzies' *Invaders from Mars* (1953), in which a young boy is the key to preventing an alien invasion, and Irvin S. Yeaworth Jr. and Russell Doughten's *The Blob* (1958), in which a mysterious mini-meteorite strikes Earth, and from within it emerges a weird, gelatinous alien creature (cf. Gerani 15). This 'shapeless' threat was quite influential, inspired sequels and was eventually 'digested' by filmmakers outside the US, as in Rubén Galindo's *Santo against the Murderers from Other Worlds* (*Santo Contra Los Asesinos de Otros Mundos,* 1973). The lineage of alien invaders – as well as monsters created by radioactive mutation – multiplied in the late 1950s. Edgar G. Ulmer's *The Man from Planet X* (1958) revisited the alien invasion motif, now potentialized by some unscrupulous human behaviour, while Edward Cahn's *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* adapted an insightful story by Jerome Bixby – the idea of a clandestine alien killer aboard a spaceship –, preempting the Alien film series that would start in 1979. Kurt Neumann's *The Fly* (1958) provided one of the weirdest and most thought-provoking monsters from cinema, Dr. Andre Delambre (David Hedison) as the fly-man. This film inspired sequels and a remake by David Cronenberg in the 1980s. By the end of the 1950s, Jules Verne's oeuvre still continued inspiring lavish productions such as Henry Levin's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1959), with James Mason in the role of Professor Oliver Lindenbrook. An interesting American film of the period is Ronald MacDougall's *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1959), a post-apocalyptic drama involving racial and sexual issues about the coexistence of the three sole survivors of the human race. Finally, Stanley Kramer's *On the Beach* (1959), adapted from Nevil Shute's novel and shot on location in Australia and the US, is a remarkable sample of pacifist science fiction from the 1950s, a melancholic warning about the dangers of nuclear warfare and a kind of audiovisual 'documentary' of its time.

In Eastern Europe, during the transition from the 1950s to 1960s, it is worth mentioning Kurt Maetzig's *The Silent Star* (aka *Der schweigende Stern*, *Raumschiff Venus antwortet nicht*, *Milczaca Gwiazda* or *First Spaceship on Venus*), a space adventure based on Stanislaw Lem's *The Astronauts* (1951). According to Phil Hardy, "this film inaugurated a series of Eastern European space operas (*Planet Burg*, 1962; *Meshte Nastreshu*, 1963; *Ikarie XB-1*, 1963) no doubt following the flights of Sputnik (1957) and Gagarin (1961)" (202). *The Silent Star* presents a

pacifist message, much in the spirit of other 'ban the bomb' films like *On the Beach* (1959) or *Beyond the Time Barrier* (1960) (Cf. Hardy 202).

> Outside America, countries which subsequently became major producers of Science Fiction films – Britain, Japan, Italy and Mexico – turned to the genre in their own distinctive ways. […] Similarly, when Eastern European film-makers turned to the genre, their films – like *Niebo Zowiet* (1959) – were, for the most part, remarkably free of the paranoia that infected American films. (Hardy, 2005, p. 124)

6. The 1960s.

Phil Hardy considers the 1960s the decade in which "science fiction becomes respectable" (196). In 1960, the most famous adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine* was directed by George Pal, while Fritz Lang's *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (*Die Tausend Augen des Dr Mabuse*, 1960) sparked a revival of Mabuse thrillers. In Italy, Antonio Margheritti's *Space Men* (1960) "introduced a series of visually exciting mainstream Science Fiction films" (ibid.). In Latin America, Jesús Franco's *Cries in the Night* or *The Awful Dr. Orllof* (*Gritos em la Noche,* 1962) "initiated a stream of medically inclined Science Fiction-horror films" (ibid.). The transplant motif gained some essential titles like Georges Franju's *Eyes without a Face* (*Les Yeux sans Visage*, 1960), Hiroshi Teshigahara's *The Face of Another* (*Tanin No Kao*, 1966) and John Frankenheimer's *Seconds* (1966). Byron Haskin's *Robinson Crusoe on Mars* (1964) transposed Daniel Defoe's famous novel to the Red Planet, providing interesting issues in terms of gender and post-colonial analysis. Also in 1964, Nathan Juran's *First Men in the Moon* adapted H. G. Wells' famous homonymous novel. Curtis Harrington's *Queen of Blood* (1966) transposed the vampire theme into space, as did Mario Bava's *Planet of Vampires* (*Terrore Nello Spazio*, 1965). Also in Italy, Ugo Gregoretti directed *Omicron*, an SF comedy released in 1963, about a creature from another planet, who re-animates the corpse of an Italian worker played by Renato Salvatori. Jean-Claude Forest's sexy comic book heroine arrived on the big screen with *Barbarella* (1967), an Italian-French production directed by Roger Vadim and starring Jane Fonda. Another Italian-French production, Mario Bava's *Diabolik* (1968) chronicles the adventures of a super-criminal.

In the UK, it is worth noting the adaptations of John Wyndham's works – such as Wolf Rilla's *Village of the Damned* (1960) and Steve Sekely's *The Day of the Triffids* (1962) – while speculations about the atomic threat continued to appear in films such as Val Guest's *The Day the Earth Caught Fire* (1961), and Joseph Losey's *The Damned* (1963). Inaugurated by *The War Game* (1966), a series of "documentaries of the future" (Hardy 247), directed by Peter Watkins, is also worth

mentioning. Watkin's *The War Game* uses simulated newsreels and street interviews to focus on the appalling results of a nuclear attack on a small Kent town.

Size still matters, so Eugène Lourie directed giant monsters again in *Gorgo* (1961), a British-American production. In Japanese cinema, radioactive monster movies multiplied in parallel to warnings about a nuclear holocaust, such as Shigeaki Hidaka and William Ross's *The Final War* (*Dai sanji Hence Sekai Taisen - Yonju-Ichi in Kyofu,* 1960), while gigantic monsters confronted each other in such productions as Ishiro Honda's *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (*Kingu Kongu tai Gojira*, 1962).

In the Soviet Union, Pavel Klushantsev's *Planet Bur* (1962) is a resourceful space exploration film, a kind of Soviet response to *Destination Moon*. In *Planet Bur*, communist ideology underpins the narrative accordingly. In films like *Road to the Stars* (*Doroga k zvezdam*, 1957), *Luna* (1965) or *Planet Bur* (1961), Pavel Klushantsev was already using techniques, which later came to be considered 'pioneering' special effects in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) (cf. Skotak and Barker). *Planet Bur* was later recut, dubbed and released in the US as Curtis Harrington's *Voyage to the Prehistoric Planet* (1965), and served as the basis for Peter Bogdanovich's *Voyage to the Planet of Prehistoric Women* (1968).

In France, a new wave of SF films began with Chris Marker's *La Jetée* (1962), an impressive dystopian love story about a temporal paradox made of still photographs. Later on, François Truffaut's *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) presented an adaptation of Ray Bradbury's homonymous novel, while Alain Resnais's *Je t'aime, je t'aime* (1967) brought us a love story immersed in a time paradox similar to *La Jetée.* In *Alphaville* (1965), Jean-Luc Godard put forth an ironic reflection upon Cartesianism, societies of control and film genre. Godard ventured into science fiction once again with the short *The New World* (*Il Nuovo Mondo*), an episode of *Ro.go.pa.g*, a French-Italian production from 1963. The Italian-American production *The Last Man on Earth* (*L'Ultimo uomo della Terra*, 1964), directed by Ubaldo Ragona, adapted Richard Matheson's impressive and influential novel *I am Legend* (1954) about a post-apocalyptic world dominated by vampire mutants in which there is only one man left. Robert Sheckley's short story "The Seventh Victim" also earned a film adaptation in Italy. Produced by Carlo Ponti, Elio Petri's *The Tenth Victim* (*La Decima Vittima*, 1965) presents Marcello Mastroiani and Ursula Andress as competing killers in the 21st Century where legalized murder has taken place of birth control and war (cf. Hardy 238).

> More significant than the internationalization of the genre […] was the new-found respectability of Science Fiction in Europe. Films like *The War Game* (1965), *Alphaville* (1965), *Farenheit 451* (1966) and *Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime* (1967) used the speculative possibilities of Science Fiction to intriguing purpose. Similarly in Japan,

> the once simple movies about radiation-induced monsters developed until, by the end of the decade, the sub-genre had become a fascinating mirror of postwar Japanese political history. (Hardy 196)

In the same period, American low budget films continued appearing, both forgettable B-movies and clever, resourceful independent films. Examples are Roger Corman's *The Wasp Woman* (1960) and George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Somewhat in the style of Matheson's *I am Legend*, *Night of the Living Dead* 'science-fictionalizes' the zombie motif in a modestly budgeted film that relies mainly on ingenious makeup, dramatic atmosphere and editing.

Finding a *continuum* in the late 1950s with the 1960s, Phil Hardy observes that

> [T]he success of *On the Beach* (1959) encouraged established stars and directors to turn to Science Fiction. The bigger budgets they brought with them resulted in films as diverse as *The Birds* (1963), *Dr Strangelove* (1964) and *Seconds* (1966). The culmination of this trend came in 1968 with the release of *2001 – A Space Odyssey* and *Planet of the Apes*. *Apes*, which generated four sequels and a teleseries, gave added weight to the questioning tendency of big-budget Science Fiction while *2001* transformed both the look and the budgets of Science Fiction films. Equally influential, though not as celebrated at the time, was George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) which created a sub-genre which would be mined throughout the seventies in countless exploitation pictures, by Romero as well as others. (196)

In Brazil, one of the most genuine SF films appears in 1962: Alberto Pieralisi's *The Fifth Power* (*O Quinto Poder*), produced and written by Carlos Pedregal. *The Fifth Power* is about an international conspiracy that aims to dominate Brazilian natural resources. In the same year, science fiction and comedy reappear together in *The Cosmonauts* (*Os Cosmonautas*, 1962), directed by Victor Lima. In *The Cosmonauts*, a visionary Brazilian scientist leads the national space program and sends two astronauts into space involuntarily. The film was released approximately in the same time period as the missile crisis in Cuba. Its pacifist political discourse is coloured by the usual array of troubles in comedies, such as mistaken identity, treasure hunts, etc., culminating with an alien encounter that resembles *The Day the Earth Stood Still.* Throughout the 1960s, Brazilian SF films seemed instrumental for political expression and criticism, from *The Fifth Power* to Walter Lima Jr.'s *Brazil Year 2000* (*Brasil Ano 2000*, 1969). Released during the military dictatorship, *Brazil Year 2000* can be regarded as a kind of 'tropicalist SF allegory'.

Meanwhile, science fiction cinema in Czechoslovakia presented at least three noteworthy titles: Jindricj Polák's *Ikarie XB-1* (1963), an ingenious film about an expedition in search of intelligent life in the universe, a prelude to *Solaris* and *2001; Who Killed Jessie?* (*Kdo chce zabit Jessii?*, 1966), a metalinguistic comedy by Vaclav Vorlícek; and Jan Schmidt's *The End of August at the Hotel Ozone* (*Konec Sprna v Hotelu Ozon*, 1967), a melancholic post-apocalyptic dystopia.

In Mexico, science fiction became even more popular through films starring the famous wrestler Santo – like Alfredo Crevenna's *Santo vs. The Martian Invasion* (*Santo el enmascardo de plata vs la invasión de los marcianos,* 1967), or René Cardona's *Santo in the Treasure of Dracula* (*Santo en El Tesoro de Dracula,* 1969) –, and titles such as Rogelio González's *The Ship of Monsters* (*La Nave de los monstruos,* 1960), about alien women seeking for male specimens to be taken to their planet, or *Planet of the Female Invaders* (*El Planeta de las mujeres invasoras,* 1966), directed by Alfredo Crevenna. In the late 1960s, Federico Curiel's *Hellish Spiders* (*Arañas Infernales,* 1968) performed a climactic clash between Earthling champion Blue Demon and Prince Arac, from galaxy Aracnia, while Rene Cardona's *Wrestling Women vs. the Murderous Robot* (*Las Luchadoras contra el robot asesino,* 1969), presented beautiful wrestlers fighting robots.

Released in 1965, the American-Argentine production *Stay Tuned for Terror* (*Extraña Invasión*, 1965), directed by Emilio Vieyra, featured television spectators turned zombies by exposure to sinister TV signals. Later, Argentine cinema was driven to a more experimental, Brechtian SF with Hugo Santiago's *Invasión* (1969). Written by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares[1], *Invasion* premiered in 1969 and soon became a cult movie. *Invasion* is about events in Aquilea, a fictional city that is being harassed by mysterious agents in 1957. As with Alberto Pieralisi's *The Fifth Power* (1962) in Brazil, *Invasion* is an SF movie that anticipates the military dictatorship that would befall Argentina.

In the late 1960s, American cinema attempted a more in-depth and philosophical SF. Released soon after Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964), which is maybe the most insightful reflection upon Cold War paranoia, Sidney Lumet's *Fail Safe* (1964) tells the story of an accidental nuclear attack waged on Russia by the USA. To avert a world war and appease the Russians, the American President is forced to bomb New York in this psychological science fiction thriller. Human cognition improved by scientific experiments was the main motif in Ralph Nelson's *Charly* (1968), a film based on Daniel Keyes's short story and later novel *Flowers for Algernon*. For his main role in *Charly*, Cliff Robertson won the 1968 Academy Award for Best Actor – a fairly unusual award for a science fiction film. Franklin J. Schaffner's aforementioned *Planet of the Apes* (1968) revisited a formula already explored in an episode of *The Twilight Zone*, as well as in the Mexican film *The Modern Bluebeard*: Earth mistaken as another planet. Also in 1968 a watershed of SF cinema appeared with the première of Stanley

1 The basic idea of the film, a city being threatened, was proposed by Santiago. Borges and Bioy Casares wrote almost all of the dialogue, as well as contributing many significant suggestions.

Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), a loose adaptation of Arthur C. Clarke's short story "The Sentinel" (1948). *2001* undoubtedly impelled SF film to a new level from the late 1960s onwards.

Mark Bould includes among the principal 1960s SF filmmakers John Frankenheimer, director of *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962), and Peter Watkins, with *Privilege* (1967). Bould remarks, however, that neither of these directors would equal Stanley Kubrick:

> *Doctor Strangelove* (1964), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and, especially, *2001: A Space Odissey* (1968) demonstrate a darkly comic vision and a suspicion of technology counterpointed by a determination to explore the formal limits of filmmaking and its apparatuses. Although directors such as Ridley Scott, Terry Gilliam, Luc Besson and Jean-Pierre Jeunet would bring as distinctive visual styles to sf moviemaking, only Andrei Tarkovsky, in *Solaris* (1972), *Stalker* (1979) and *Offret* (*The Sacrifice*, 1986), has treated the genre with comparable wit and rigour. (91)

This brief panorama of SF cinema, from 1895 to the late 1960s, suggests that the genre began in a prototypical form marked by transnationalism and a certain embryonic 'universalist' vocation, regardless of the colonial or imperialist ideologies affecting Early Cinema as a whole. Shortly after, in the 1920s, SF cinema starts finding its identity through politically engaged utopian/dystopian fiction, in parallel to the expansion of Hollywood cinema. In the 1950s, SF cinema consolidates as a genre, notably in America. This American science fiction cinema somehow eclipsed transnational SF film production for years to come. However, in the 1960s, the rise of SF cinema in Europe, made possible especially through the work of *auteur*-filmmakers, contributed to a 'new wave' of internationalization for the genre. Despite being arguable, and widely discussed and revised over the last years, Miriam Hansen's idea of "vernacular modernism" might provide an interesting theoretical framework for the historical analysis of SF cinema. In "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism", Hansen coined the term "vernacular modernism" to explain how even classical Hollywood cinema could be a popular form of modernism that served many cultures as a horizon for coming to grips with modernity. Considering that, outside of America, countries turned to SF cinema in their own distinctive ways (cf. Hardy 124), the idea of "vernacular modernism" could be revisited in order to better understand how science fiction cinema was absorbed and reconfigured in global terms. This conjecture, however, still deserves further research. To conclude, it would like to be stated that throughout the first 75 years of cinema, science fiction set its roots, expanded and eventually consolidated to become one of the most profitable and thought-provoking cinematic genres, configuring a true mythology of our times. Everything that has appeared from the 1970s onwards – be it on film, TV or games – has a connection with this foundational era.

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