

A landscape photograph of a mountain valley. In the foreground, there is a lush green forest of tall trees. The middle ground shows a wide valley with rolling hills and a prominent rainbow arching across the sky. The background features dark, misty mountain peaks under a grey, overcast sky. The overall mood is serene and atmospheric.

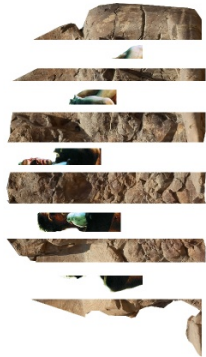
CRANK INVASION
OF THE
LAND OF SHEEP

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THE RAINBOW BRIDGE

We cannot repress our base instincts: they are powerful vestigial remains. "The unknown woman stands in the land of sheep and points the way." (1) The "Land of Sheep", or "Children's Land", according to Jung, represents a time before our rational consciousness separated from our historical collective unconscious. This radical crack almost destroyed our instinct and "soul", but not entirely. Our infantile impulses continuously intrude on our conscious minds. We repress these infantile desires by means of "cynical affectation of old age or embittered resignation" instead of accepting them as part of ourselves and using them wisely. But our (only recently) rational psyche is ill equipped to deal with mystery and outwardly hostile to life, so we continue to search for the "fountainhead" through visions from nirvana. These visions of the "Children's Land" are only reachable via weeping Virgin Mary statutes, Star Wars, hazy Rothko paintings and certain pharmaceuticals that help us span the "chimerical rainbow bridge" where disbelief is wholeheartedly suspended.



THE CRACK

Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* cleverly transfers our hollow rational selves into androids imbued with an aching search for meaning: "attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion". Will our technological creations come to life and speak to us wistfully about the celestial spheres? The Colossi of Memnon was an early version of this dream: in 27 BC, after an earthquake shattered one of the statues, it began to "sing", emitting an otherworldly whining sound from deep within the stone. Oracular powers were attributed to the statue's song and the Voice of Memnon became famous around the Roman Empire. Although science may explain the "voice" as the evaporation of dew inside porous stone, it cannot explain our hope that statues may produce oracular wisdom. Slovenian philosopher Mladen Dolar last year told my students and I that we should "not give up on the crack". I believe he meant we should search within the crack and consciously engage both our rational and pre-rational selves still located deep inside.

MANIPULATION REGRESSION

There is a tremendous difference between fantasy and speculative fiction. Mobile phones were once speculative fiction, shocking to anyone in the 19th century, but using my iPhone to call Jesus Christ is fantasy. Speculative fiction is a powerful drive to expand contingencies while fantasy is a crutch that enables our feeble lameness to continue infinitely. The former utilizes real knowledge to speculate where untraversed paths could lead while the latter is hung up on unfocused cartoons usually manipulated by ideology. (The Buddhists call this the “monkey mind” because the mind flips from branch to branch.) Through myth building, life’s complications can be reduced, flavored by desire and sold back to a public hungry to witness its own dreams. At best, these dreams forecast a future where the noblest aspects of the human character are victorious and have evolved into benevolent, shiny porcelain. However, our imaginations are usually held hostage by our own impulses: imprisoned by a narrow outlook on what is possible, we drift towards cheap fantasy fulfilment while sticking to familiar impulses and realities.

Instead of courageously smashing limited assumptions about the world or improving our lives by intelligently employing tools and strategies to solve real problems, we employ trompe l’oeil verisimilitude to satisfy childish regression. Our preoccupation with cheap romance, petty power struggle and resource hoarding is hopelessly predictable.



Even dystopian imagination is driven by such morbid desire. While anything is possible using cinema magic, what we usually see is people getting what they think they want. Julian Barnes' heaven is democratic:

"We don't impose Heaven on people anymore, 'she said. 'We listen to their needs. If they want it, they can have it; if not, not. And then of course they get the sort of Heaven they want.

'And what sort do they want on the whole?'

'Well, they want a continuation of life, that's what we find. But... better, needless to say.

'Sex, golf, shopping, dinner, meeting famous people and not feeling bad?' I asked, a bit defensively.

'It varies. But if I were being honest, I'd say it doesn't vary all that much. We often get people asking for bad weather, for instance, or for something to go wrong. They miss things going wrong. Some of them ask for pain.'" (2)

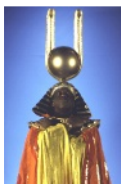
ESCAPE

Structurally, sci-fi and its undead sister, utopia, are ambiguous and employable by a full ideological spectrum. We escape into the opiate of dreams so we may passively accept our unacceptable environments. In the documentary film "Trekkies" a paralyzed woman told a Star Trek actress: "For the hour you are on I forget about the body I am trapped in." We look for diversion to forget our own powerlessness, and to live vicariously through fictional characters living more intensely and more self-empowered than us. (To paraphrase Debord.) Our feeble imaginations have been easily manipulated time and time again by religion, politics and culture.

After an epic struggle, the winning "utopia" in the 20th century ended up being capitalism. Adam Smith's "invisible hand" would make a great title for a sci-fi film and is as echt as a Jedi using "the Force". Nevertheless, the followers of Saint Reagan invoke the invisible hand as gospel truth to a ready-made audience who believe anything they are told with an authoritative voice, especially if followed by biblical chasers. Capitalism employs a relentless and ruthless propaganda machine to keep the ball rolling, and one of its main arms is entertainment including sci-fi. It is unusual therefore that John Carpenter's film "They Live", a barely veiled critical satire of capitalism, could come directly from the belly of Hollywood. (But it is not a surprise that it pretty much ruined his future there afterwards.)

△LTERNATE REALITY

The rare and precious sci-fi film is one with alternative goals. Cinema magic can also be employed as a means to expose alternate realities and offer futures that do not correspond to the officially sanctioned ones. There are many sci-fi film gems successfully dealing with the great issues by focusing on non-mainstream narratives and redefining assumptions.



The driving desire in many films is to be heard and to be seen, resisting the silence that is the essential condition of marginalization. Sun Ra's film "Space is the Place" is, like many of his albums, deceptively naïve. In the film, Sun Ra in full costume appears in the middle of a recreation center filled with black youth. "How do you know I'm real? I'm not real, I'm just like you. I do not come to you as the reality, I come to you as the myth because that's what black people are, myths. I came from a dream that the black man dreamed, long ago." We are living in the space age and there are limited seats to the moon. But anyone can send music to outer space to demonstrate intelligence to any "aliens" who might be listening in.

Invasión (1969) Dir. Hugo Santiago. Written by Jorge Luis Borges, Adolfo Bioy Casares and Hugo Santiago. Argentina.



Liberxina 90 and *Invasión* are also examples of radical voices coming from within oppressed societies, the former from inside Franco's Spain, and the latter from Onganía's rule in Argentina. Although threatened, harassed and edited by Franco's censors, *Liberxina 90* ultimately was shown at the Venice Film Festival before getting shut down until the end of fascist rule. Even heavily edited, it pulled off a fairly obvious critique through an abstract plot, and a thin curtain of speculative sci-fi. Likewise the ambiguity of Jorge Luis Borges' script for the film *Invasión* could be interpreted as a portrait of resistance against dictatorships, but it took a few years to get banned. The film was highly prognostic of Latin America's tragic future ahead: the film's torture and murder scene from inside a stadium was remarkably prescient of the atrocities that would take place in nearby Chile: the National Stadium would become the official public place of imprisonment and torture.

While many challenging films struggle with censorship and finances, Cronenberg's film "Shivers" was the most profitable Canadian film made to date in 1975, and it was debated in the Canadian Parliament. (3) Cronenberg said he identified with the infected, sexual and violent residents of the exclusive Starliner Towers. Did the strange virus liberate the psyche from overly rational behavior and return its victims to the Land of Sheep? Or do the towers symbolize an isolated, privileged society doomed to self-destruct via its own self-indulgence?

What emerges from the fog of history is that our cyclical struggles against alien invaders spring from deep within us. "We need a radically negative anthropology, we need a few abstractions that are just empty enough, just transparent enough to prevent our usual prejudices, a physics that holds in store, for each being its disposition toward the miraculous."(4) When physics is warped into a rainbow bridge on our search for the fountainhead, will it lead us to the unrecognizable beyond desire?

Perhaps if we keep our wits about us it will.

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1. C.G. Jung. Psychology and Alchemy. Routledge. London 1953
2. Barnes, Julian. "A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters" 1989.
3. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shivers_%28film%29
4. Tiqqun Introduction to Civil War. Semiotext(e) intervention series 4. Los Angeles 2007



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