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From Cinema Myths to Science Fantasy: Contemporary Hybrid Cinema and Sci-fi "Avatars"

ABSTRACT

Departing from the concept of "science fantasy" – increasingly employed in postwar film genre theory (Malmgren, 1988; Attebery, 1992) – the paper analyses a hybrid genre and the related structure overlaps and cross-strategies, as well as the practice of contemporary Sci-Fi of assimilating and recycling traditional myths and fantasy motifs. Thus, the paper focuses on the manner in which contemporary cinema storytelling has evolved towards hybrid genre paradigms, combining cultural and particularly cinematic strategies and motifs belonging to diverse and sometimes incongruous traditions. However, these elements target the familiarity of the audiences and therefore legitimise themselves based on their belonging to a collective cultural memory. The case study discusses Cameron's 2000s iconic film *Avatar* as illustrating the concept of "science fantasy" in its hybrid cinematic approach, combining in a complementary manner implicit religious and myth patterns with scientific Sci-Fi stereotypes.

KEYWORDS

Media; Cinema Myths; Film Genre; Science Fantasy; Escapism.

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Media Myths and Contemporary Cinema

Contemporary media and cinema in particular have provided an extraordinary environment for the development of modern narratives, offering storytelling a large range of channels, vehicles and strategies beyond the traditional oral (and then written) paradigm. The cinema narrative structures – transferred into the area of visual culture (and therefore enriched by the latter's means and technologies, such as the more recent 3D approach) – could be considered as part of a contemporary hybrid storytelling, as they preserve most of the traditional themes, motifs and language while employing specific multimedia tools. While postwar media could generally be considered an environment for the development of a new – visually focused – type of communication a modern, specific narratives, cinema can be seen as probably the most significant and privileged storytelling environment (Fătu-Tutoveanu & Pintilescu, 195). This can be explained both through its accessibility and mass impact as well as through its specific medium and resources, providing the narrative with a multi-sensorial background, which added audio-visual depth (as well as increasingly sophisticated special effects) to the storyline, which



made the most improbable fantasies seem vivid and real. However, the novelty of its media did not mean the dismantling of traditional resources of storytelling; on the contrary, cinema incorporated them at all levels, from the narrative patterns and themes to characters, motifs or symbols. “These are just old stories disguised into new storytelling practices” (Pop, 2013, 16). This is so not only because these models had been functional and efficient for centuries in transmitting the message of the narrative and produce the intended emotional impact) but also because the film makers grasped from the very beginning the audience’s unconscious preference for familiar associations and recollections and therefore their significance for the storyteller would eventually contribute to the success and impact of the story. “The concept of the familiarity of images, borrowed from perceptual psychology, when used to understand the functioning of contemporary imaginary formations shows that there is direct link between cultural memory and visual recognition. We are attached to those images which are familiar to us, we tend to use these images in order to organize our past, which lead to an *amalgamated imaginary* built by transferred values of various visual structures” (11-12). Moreover, this fascination with recurrent patterns and typologies that have been culturally and collectively memorised has been associated by film genre theorists with the preference for revisiting stories fitting in the same genre, despite their predictability in some occasions, in their attempt to explain “why does an audience member keep returning to a favoured story type (genre) which a formalistic structure often makes predictable” (Gehring, 1). By extrapolating, we might say that has even led to the creation of genres as cultural (and in this case cinematic) matrices in which the viewer seeks less to find a recognisable setting or image but rather the

recreation of an emotional association (“[u]ltimately, our familiarity with any genre seems to depend less on recognizing a specific setting than on recognizing certain dramatic conflicts that we associate with specific patterns of action and character relationships”, Schatz, 21).

If cinema is a privileged environment for becoming a contemporary audience favourite contemporary storyteller, the fact that its narrative and hero patterns as well as the entire symbolism and motif employment stem from the traditional storytelling paraphernalia as well as its use of prefabricated structures bring to the surface the issue of myth reuse (or recycling) as a central strategy in 20th and 21st centuries cinema. This association is not only apparent but also necessary, because myths themselves are basically recurrent and familiar structures (“a myth never disappears... it only changes its aspect and disguises its operations”, Eliade, 27), foundational to storytelling in all its shapes. While all media employ, recycle and recreate “symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture” (Kellner, n.pag.), within cinema myths represent the prototype and key elements of this audio-visual storytelling. “The ‘dream factory’ of cinema ... ‘takes over and employs countless mythical motifs – the fight between hero and monster, initiatory combats and ordeals, paradigmatic figures and images (the maiden, the hero, the paradisaical landscape, hell, and so on)” (Eliade, 205).

Generally, myth “functions as a timeless model” (Törnquist-Plewa, 14), while archetypes (or “mythologems”) manifest “in recurrent myths, which can be traced in any number of manifestations, yet preserving the initial qualities. Even if the archetype is not a myth, there is an archetypal continuity of myths, traced by Jung within the



unconscious of humanity, the collective consciousness manifested in symbols (Jung 1956). Following this immutable nature of myth, one of the most important descriptions of this archetypal functioning of mythmaking comes from Joseph Campbell, who has condensed the heroic pattern into a single 'monomyth'. The hero embarks upon his adventures then comes back, this is a single repeated plot: Prometheus, Ulysses, Jason, St. George they are all part of a stable archetypal structure (Campbell 1972)" (Pop, 2013, 11).

However, the functions of myths go beyond that of providing a functional and logical structure for the storyline (such as the recurrent hero's journey pattern, much discussed after Campbell's classic work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 1949) as they have preserved their original function of meaning and coherence providers. This feature – together with their quality of being easily recognisable and familiar (and in consequence trustworthy, a significant trait when the myth are employed in advertising and political campaigning, involving persuasion) – has been preserved within the cinema storytelling, although the myths themselves have been sometime lost coherence, being reduced to stereotypes, amalgamated or read in a "dyslexic" manner (Pop, 2013) by the filmmakers. However, a patterns such as the hero's journey – extremely present in 20th and 21st centuries cinema – even when reduced to its basics, plays its functions of meaning provider (towards the hero's initiation and maturity, which is obvious even in an atypical storyline as the 2008 *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*). "In anthropological terms, the essence of myth is that it provides a narrative structure and coherence to the history of the community; it is a shared narrative that gives meaning. What myth presents is a symbolic reconstruction of the community's

formation. This reconstruction may be based on real events, or on phenomena which have no existence independent of the myth itself [emphasis added]" (Gill, 2011, 3-4). Dealing with real past events or, on the contrary, with imagined approaches on the founding of the community – and the world, for that matter, if we consider the grand cosmogonic narratives – the myth has always had the role to provide the community with "meaning and significance for the present and thereby reinforcing the authority of those who are wielding power in a particular community" (Friedrich and Brzezinski, 99). *Meaning, coherence* but also *community* represent key terms in this context, being also related to the above-mentioned idea of media preserving and recycling familiar, collective archetypes. The community, be it small or large, and even global (as it happens in the case of contemporary mainstream cinema) is unified by (and around) this cultural structure and meaning/purpose provider. An interesting example in the case of cinema is the already iconic *Avatar* that led to an emotional impact associated to the emergence of a sense of belonging to a virtual (utopian) community can represent an example concerning the effects of contemporary cinema myths. "Myth is therefore foundational for the community in the sense that it provides the basic rationale for the community, a sense of its meaning and purpose as well as how it came about. What is important is less the empirical basis of the myth than that the myth is accepted and believed in. To cite Murray Edelman, myth is 'a belief held in common by a large group of people that gives events and actions a particular meaning; it is typically socially cued rather than empirically based'. Myth is therefore socially constructed and is a means of both defining and explaining reality for those who believe in it" (Gill, 2011, 3-4).

This function is also transferred, together with the rest of the structure, into



contemporary media (and popular culture), proving itself more necessary in a space populated with inflational discourses and also less difficult to implement in its heterogeneous contemporary hypostasis). “The myth has a stable role and manifestation, it is a form of fixating the reality of social life into a narrative of some sorts. In this sense we can develop a mythological interpretation of cultural objects; myth operates within the boundaries of a popular culture founded on a re-representation of the “new” (politics, ideology) with the tools of the “old” (images, narratives, myths)” (Pop, 2013, 11). Moreover, the fictional approach – and with even more so the in the case of science fiction and fantasy, or their hybrid offspring, the science fantasy, which disrupts the scientific (appearance of) logic of the former – can provide the viewer solely with the *illusion* of meaning and coherence.

This need of meaning overlaps another tendency that has led to the survival and intensive recycling of myths and implicit religious patterns in contemporary media (and is most visible in cinema, due to its complex fictional paraphernalia) – i.e. the “nostalgia for the sacred” (Linnitt, par. 3). This tendency can be detected both at the explicit level and – more persistently – in the form of an unconscious search or quest for meaning and coherence embodied in the cinema narratives and the related virtual, alternative worlds (such as Cameron’s planet of Pandora). Myths can (and do, in different forms) nurture this longing for the sacred, even if not perceived as such (Eliade’s idea about the camouflage of the sacred into the profane: “This dimension is not always obvious, since sacrality is in a sense camouflaged in the immediate, in the ‘natural’ and the everyday” (Eliade, 263).

Cinema represents one of these profane or secularised cultural environments. This as, despite its independence from any forms of explicit religious manifestations, it

preserves and perpetuates myths within its narratives, even if this means reducing, simplifying and mixing them in more digestible formulas. “This consumerism expanded at the cultural level (visual arts, music, media etc.) has not lead to the extinction of the presence of religious aspects within culture, on the contrary, religious patterns, symbols, characters or behaviours have persisted in the new cultural paradigm, although they were recycled, reinterpreted or even hidden under the mask of secular and even industrialised art, such as, for instance, Hollywood cinema. Popular culture became a favourite space of dialogue and the melting pot of the cultural and religious diversity characterising the contemporary world and in the same time fulfilling, without religious institutions constraints, the “modern man’s need for the sacred in spite of tendencies to restrain its force in the cultural practices of modernity’ (Frunză, 194)” (Fătu-Tutoveanu & Pintilescu, 183-184).

This process of recycling and reinterpreting myths within cinema can be considered both reductive, in terms of depth and complexity but also inclusive if one considers their capacity to integrate diverse, even incongruous structures (“this mixing up of narratives creates a *spandex* [Knowles 2007] mythology, one which is elastic and inclusive, opened to a more complex interpretation.”, Pop, 2013, 17). Thus, it can be seen as a pop art like collage whose message and meaning detach themselves from the traditional messages the individual pieces had initial provided. Pop (2013) also considers that we can speak of a phase in this process of incorporating myths into cinema narratives, what he considers to be “a third phase of the mythological representations. In this trend, the copy-like nature of the cinema mythologies brings with it the practice of multi-layered, multiple connections of meaning. In this sense, the myths



are not simply de-territorialized, that is transposed into another field of signification only to create new meaning, but they become a part of an *amalgamation process*” (15).

We identify therefore a tendency not only towards the recurrence of narrative patterns and heroes but also towards hybridisation of both myths and narrative frameworks (visible within the changes and hybridity of film genres as discussed below), characterising – through diversity, hybridity and myth inflation – this process of recycling and assimilation.

Hybrid Film Genres: Science Fantasy

Despite its future-oriented approach, the science fiction genre shares with the other narratives – fantasy among them – “a long prehistory of traditional story forms: Odysseus’s voyage and Icarus’s flight are precursors of both modern genres” (Attebery, 106). The two above mentioned cultural archetypes are however just two examples in a long list of recognisable structures, narrative patterns and especially of “themes developed by science fiction literature, popularising, adapting, and visually re-shaping for mainstream audience specific *topoi* elaborated by science fiction writers. Science fiction films propose alternative realities and imaginary worlds, which express either utopian or dystopian visions, all somewhat opposed to/ opposing everyday life. Science fiction cinema is more closely related to fantasy cinema than it is often believed; however, while fantasy worlds are generally set in a mythic, magic past, science fiction films are usually set in the future and the stress is on science (or technology)” (Bittarello, 6).

“When science began to deliver on the promises made by alchemists and

magicians... a new genre was constructed from pieces of the old” (Attebery, 106). Thus, the separation between the two kindred genres, science fiction and fantasy, might be seen just as a matter of translation into a new vocabulary and of filtering through a scientific approach of the fantastic worlds and characters. “Immortality may be represented as being achieved through pharmacology; prophecy may be termed precognition; spells of illusion may be explained as the amplification and projection of brain waves... Science fiction is able to make us perceive a fantastic idea as something reasonable and even likely, given enough time to work out the mechanics, while fantasy can take something that already exists and make it seem miraculous. In both cases, the operation is a matter of rhetoric: the way an idea is introduced, the vocabulary used to describe it, the manner in which it is made into an element of the story” (Attebery, 111).

However, Brian Attebery admits that – although the difference between the two genres is a matter of rhetoric – there are elements in fantasy that go beyond the denial of science and of the possible: “affirming impossibility, fantasy opens the door to mythology, which is the name we give to cast-off megatexts. Gods, fairies, ancestor spirits, spells; a whole host of motifs no longer convey belief and yet retain their narrative momentum and – and here is one of the great differences between science fiction and fantasy – their congruence with the ways we saw the world” (108-9). While obeyed by the Sci-Fi convention – “scientific terminology reigns supreme, even in the most non-cognitive space opera... Science serves as a megatext for each SF text”, (Attebery, 107) – scientific epistemology is circumvented by fantasy. In the latter, the magical paradigm takes over, governing the actions as well as the interpersonal relations, events happening without needing a scientific



motivation or explanation (Malmgren, 260). Despite common themes and origins, the two epistemological approaches are distinctly materialised in the respective narrative formulas. Thus, “the characteristic narrative mode of SF ...emphas[ises] external action, plausibility, and orderly chains of cause and effect. ...If science fiction’s gaze is outward and ahead, fantasy’s is inward and into the past. The discourse of fantasy encourages borrowings from folk literatures, most frequently from European fairy tales, Celtic legendry, Norse epic, and various bodies of myth. Because these traditional narratives have shed whatever external referentiality they once had for their listeners, their internal dynamics become all the more important as expressions of psychological processes” (Attebery, 109).

However, besides their differences as well as their common elements or origin in the traditional narratives, the two genres necessarily met in a hybrid narrative pattern that started to gain ground in contemporary cinema, itself, as stated above, a heterogeneous medium and hybrid storyteller. This happened both because “some writers seem to have lost faith in the scientific imagination, looking outside the scientific megatext for other ways of seeing and judging” (Attebery, 108) and due to the evolution of cultural products (and especially of those of popular culture) towards a composite and hybrid approach justified in a time of globalised communication and intensive cultural exchanges and migration dynamics.

This hybrid characteristic has become increasingly dominant in the myth and narrative recycling performed in mainstream cinema, a processed commodity meant to engage as little as possible the audiences in an effort of assimilation of the popular culture product. The cinematic (and cultural myth) stereotyping found in the emerging hybrid genre of science fantasy a comfortable area – “a locus of intersection... an

unstable hybrid form” (Malmgren, 260) – that allows filmmakers to melt and reuse elements belonging both to the scientific approach and the explicitly mythical and fantastic *topoi*. “Science fantasy is the area of that overlap. As a hybrid form, it can with equal justice be defined either as a form of fantasy that borrows from science fiction or as a subgenre of science fiction drawing inspiration from fantasy. Moreover, as a hybrid, it can be reinvented again and again as both science fiction and fantasy develop” (Attebery, 106).

Malmgren also attempted to define this hybrid genre as promoting fictional worlds that combine the features of the two types of narrative perspective, merging the “logical consistency, predictability, regularity, accountability, comprehensibility” (Malmgren, 261) specific to science fiction, with the conventional acceptance of fantastic elements. The hybrid narrative framework of science fantasy (a formula forged, among the first theorists, by Andre Norton) thus represents an area of overlap in which two epistemological approaches, the magical and the scientific, are incorporated, while the two types of convention merge, the latter being “modified so as to make room for magic” (Malmgren, 263). This fusion generated – through its specific projection of the “counternatural world within a naturalising and scientific discourse” (Malmgren, 266) – a series of very appealing stylistic, narratological and epistemological (Attebery, 105) hybrid and partially paradoxical formulas. “Like ‘magic realism’ another narrative species enjoying a burgeoning interest, science fantasy is an oxymoronic form. In the counternatural worlds of science fantasy, the imaginary and the actual, the magical and the prosaic, the mythical and the scientific, meet and interanimate” (Malmgren, 274).



Contemporary Hybrid Cinema and Sci-Fi “Avatars”

One of the subgenres of science fiction that might be successfully associated with science fantasy is space opera, considered by some “straight fantasy in science fiction drag” (Spinrad 34) being characterised as an “an inter-generic, hybrid form of both science fiction and fantasy” (Cupitt, 187). Space opera combines the science fiction classic paraphernalia with the fantasy’s breaking of the scientific order, recycling in its turn the narrative patterns and myths of the “long tradition of epic and mythic storytelling ... ‘Nostalgia aside, the [space opera] stories are one of the repositories of narrative art; furthermore, they say a great deal about the fundamental hopes and fears when confronted by the unknowns of distant frontiers, in a tradition stretching back at least as far as *The Odyssey*. They are, in their way, abstracts of the same impulses that lie behind traditional fairy tales’ (*Space Opera* 9-10)” (Cupitt, 182).

In the case of recent space operas such as Cameron’s *Avatar* (2009) the 3D technology paradoxically contributes not only to the science fiction convention but also to the materialisation of the fantastic world and characters inhabiting Pandora, enhancing the illusion of escapism: “the technological achievement matches the simplicity of the narrative thread and while 60% of this movie is artificial reconstruction, it transports the viewer deep into the fantastic flora of Pandora, an exotic moon outside the solar system, in forests populated by fabulous animals, with creatures belonging to another world and another way of life” (Pop, 2009, 23). More than a technology, 3D can be considered an addition to the means and instruments of storytelling, enhancing the

audience’s joining in the storyline by creating the illusion of their inhabiting the setting instead of the classical suspension of disbelief (Schwartz, 2010).

While the fictional worlds in general provide the audiences with a fictionally-mediated escapism from everyday reality, science fantasy (and particularly its 3D formula) represents a privileged form in offering the illusion of such an escape. “MEscapism is a term used here to emphasize a point. Escapism through media is a contemporary and broad subject, which here has been narrowed to revolve around the case of *Avatar*... [W]hen escapism is used, it is primarily used as a means to get closer to the ‘real me’. Instead of escaping into another world, the generation currently coming of age is escaping into their ideal and what they believe to be their ‘real’ self” (Church, 4). In the case of *Avatar* the escape offered by the science fantasy fictional world through the 3D technology materialised in a cinematic (but also ecological and ideological, Pop, 2009, 24) virtual habitat well synchronised with the needs of the audiences, no longer satisfied with the solution of the actual (but also Sci-Fi narratological) scientific explanations and values. “The world of Pandora comes so alive to us because the flora and fauna have been crafted with such care to reflect accurate evolutionary relationships. The creators of Pandora spent an unprecedented amount of money to reverse-engineer an alternate model of the real world using scientific principles to make such complete imaginative systems seem possible. Such a technique is believable precisely because we, as viewers, apply our prior familiarity with what real organisms look like and how they tend to behave. Indeed, in our media-saturated hyper-wired society, one might even argue that *Avatar* briefly brings the audience in *closer* contact with a fictional natural world than that audience generally has with their own *real*



natural world, and invites them also to experiment, observe, and think critically about the world with Jake and Grace” (Kanda and Wagner, par.13).

The film’s audiences were provided with a mixture of pre-processed philosophical, religious and mythological narratives, simplified for mainstream audiences into a stereotypical yet appealing form, and organised around the idea (and imagery) of a paradisiacal world. The stereotype of the lost paradise could be seen as the supreme form of fictional (and extrapolating, media) escapism. “From the start of the earliest Greek civilizations to the discovery of the Americas, there was a constant stimulation generated by the myth of the Lost Paradise. Another utopian paradise, is not an innovative concept. But this recurrent myth, together with the Edenic nature of the computer generated Garden in another planetary system, has multiple connotations, it can also be Samsara, the absolute illusory reality in Buddhism transformed by 3D technology. So, Cameron is mixing again two different cultural representations, and out of this double mirroring a new symbolic context is created.” (Pop, 2009, 25-26). Thus, this heterogeneous narrative recycled a large range of myths, motifs and symbols, as well as narrative patterns and characters, frequently identifiable in traditional storytelling but also “science-fiction culture, in films and literature celebrating putatively nature-beneficent indigenous cultures, and in cross-cultural (and cross-species) romances” (Taylor and Ivakhiv, 387).

Moreover, by adopting the science fantasy formula, the film benefitted both from the familiarity of the audiences with these myths and with the scientific paradigm and the virtual (computer) worlds. However, the film means to overcome this scientific approach and therefore science fiction is converted into science fantasy: “the film suggests that science is not transformative in

the same way that a rite of passage is, suggesting somewhat problematically that science is an *incomplete* way of seeing, even if its insights may be fully *compatible* with religious knowing” (Kanda and Wagner, par.8). The hybridity and merging of the two perspectives and addition of the magical as well as of the spiritual elements is necessary to the narrative not only in order to make it more appealing and enrich the film’s imagery but also to support the film’s ideology of overcoming the scientific paradigm and its flaws: “scientific progress (genetic engineering, neuroscience, space technology) turns out to be a human hubris and humankind could not overcome the dark side of civilization (environmental degradation, exploitation, colonialism). Humanity is placed in the tension between technological progress and moral regression” (Jeserich, par. 1). Thus, the film aims to offer the illusion of spiritual depth – not only as part of the storyline but also as part of cinema escapism, implicitly supporting the idea that media (and cinema in particular) function not only as a contemporary, updated storyteller but also as new spiritual environment that partly replaces the roles of former religious environments (Fătu-Tutoveanu and Pintilescu, 191). “Seeing as a form of immersion is a central metaphor of the film [*Avatar*], integrated with implicit arguments about how seeing and interconnectedness relate to different modes of apprehension, particularly scientific and religious ways of knowing. But which kind of seeing is privileged in *Avatar*? Despite the importance of observation of all kinds in the film, *Avatar* betrays an overt, problematic, and ultimately inaccurate preference for religious apprehension over scientific observation, arguing implicitly that while vision is important in both ways of seeing, religion offers a fully transformative experience enabled by seeing rightly, whereas science is incomplete in its



presumed inability to afford such transformative vision...

Even after removing our 3D glasses, the film seems to be urging continued observation with its invitation to 'see' religiously, scientifically, and transformatively" (Kanda and Wagner, par.1, 14).

This favouring of the spiritual experience, taking the shape of mysticism and cross-religious ritualising, was made possible precisely by the film's integration into the science fantasy genre formula, as it meant the assimilation as well as the overcoming of the scientific paradigm and its merging with the magical aspects of fantasy. Moreover, the recipe favours the extensive recycling in the film of myths and religious patterns, as they could support – together with the ambivalent genre formula – the narrative construction of two antagonistic worlds and worldviews that manage to converge at the end in the harmony promoted by the Na'vi universe (and no less, by the Hollywood cinematic happy-ending stereotype). "In the film, both science and religion allow one to arrive at a recognition of Eywa as the source of interconnectedness. Both human scientific observation and the Na'vi assessment is that Eywa is the collective interaction of the living world. Rather than a supernatural personality, Eywa is an emergent property of the ecosystem. Thus Grace is prepared by her scientific understanding of the world to arrive at the religious notion of ultimate connectedness; but within the film, this awareness is insufficient for her to pass successfully through transformation to become part of the system. Grace cannot complete the rite of passage via science alone. In the end, it is through the connection of the Na'vi religious community that she is permitted to fully see Eywa, and dies in a state of 'Grace'" (Kanda & Wagner, par. 11).

Conclusions

While culture is increasingly dominated – almost in all its forms – by media and the audio-visual cultural products, the latter have also become privileged storytelling environments. However, while providing the audiences with a technologically improved illusion of escapism (such as the 3D version of cinema) – and therefore with the suggestion of novelty–, these media narratives are rooted in traditional storytelling patterns, cultural myths and religious patterns. This recycling of familiar formulas and narrative patterns and characters is performed in a specific manner in mainstream cinema, simultaneously simplifying and amalgamating, hybridising these structures. Thus, the use of more than one approach in building fictional worlds as well as the need to overcome an exceedingly used genre has led to the necessity of merging the narrative formulas such as in the case of science fantasy, which made room for the magical elements into the space of the previously scientific epistemology. In the case study discussed above, Cameron's *Avatar* (2009), the option for this hybrid genre formula coincided with the perspective suggested by the film that opposed science to spirituality and mysticism (with pantheistic and ecological implications), which although in conflict were supposed to coexist and be accepted within the film conventions. If the film genre is the result of the recycling of two narrative formulas (science fiction and fantasy), the plot – despite its stereotypical character – stands out as a cultural puzzle, making plausible (and inhabitable, in its 3D make-believe formula) a fictional world in which more than two structures overlapped in order to create a contemporary hybrid narrative.



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