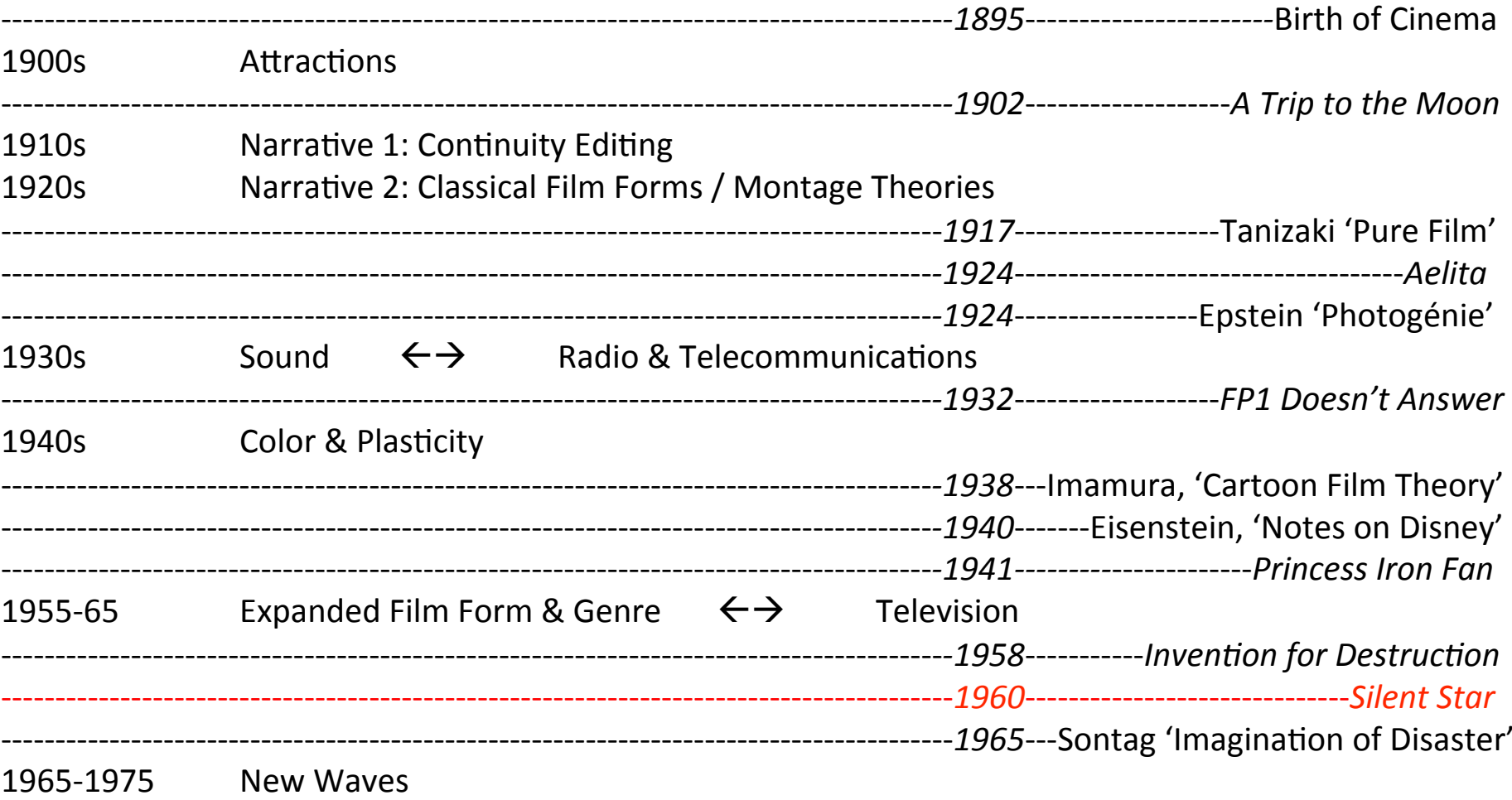


Whose Future? Whose Film?

The Communicative Function of Genres,
1955-1965





THE SILENT STAR
1960

Director: Kurt Maetzig

East Germany:
Der Schweigende Stern

Poland:
Milcząca Gwiazda

milcząca gwiazda

wg powieści St. Lona „Astronaucci” reżyseria Kurt Meelzig produkcja: ZRF Iluzjon (Polska)-Roter Kreis (NRD)

FILM HISTORY

History is not linear chronology, one thing after another. It builds on chronology in an attempt to understand change. What are some of the ways of understanding historical transformations in cinema in the readings thus far?

FILM HISTORY

History is not linear chronology, one thing after another. It builds on chronology in an attempt to understand change. What are some of the ways of understanding historical transformations in cinema?

Technology-centered histories

1. Progressivist
2. Fatalist

Production-oriented and form-centered histories

1. Adaptationist
2. Developmental (Bordwell)

Exhibition-oriented histories

1. mode of address (Gunning)
2. practices of exhibition

Reception-oriented histories

1. Cinema as paradigmatically modern (Hansen)
2. Cinema as site of negotiation between producers and audiences

Note that none of these possibilities are mutually exclusive. Even though film histories may emphasize one aspect more than others, they will tend to touch on all these issues.

SF GENRE REVIEW

So far we have looked at accounts of genre that centre mostly on form — narrative, iconic elements, *mise-en-scène*, etc.

1. Vivian Sobchak considers the plasticity of iconic elements in SF films.

2. Darko Suvin describes the tension between the scientific ‘what’ and imaginative ‘how’ of SF literature in terms of cognitive estrangement.

3. David Fortin expands on Suvin, noting that the importance of *mise-en-scène* in SF films makes them rely more on fantastical elements than novels do.

4a. Susan Sontag likewise notes that SF films, “... in place of an intellectual workout, they can supply something the novels can never provide—sensuous elaboration.”

4b. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay expands on Suvin in the context of animation, exploring how animation brings a non-Newtonian lyrical physics to the fore.

SF GENRE 5: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GENRE?

In the chapter, “What is the Purpose of Genres?” from the book *Cinema Genre*, Raphaëlle Moine invites us to consider the functional dimension of genre instead of trying to classify them. She writes, “Classificatory logics, because they conceive of genre as a group of films displaying shared characteristics... bypass the functional dimension of genre.”

Moine wants us to consider what genres do, how they function, which means taking audiences into account: “...a genre comes into being and is recognized when it organizes a set of semantic features into a stable syntax — that is, when a filmic formula is put in place that is recognizable to a public audience.”

“To understand the phenomenon of genre, therefore, one must pay attention to the ‘established formulas for communication’...”

SF GENRE 5: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GENRE?

The Productive Function of Genres

Moine reminds us that genres come to play an integral role in studio production, because they allow for increased rationalization of film production: producing more movies faster.

She reminds us of the economic and cultural clout of studio production — not only of studio production over non-studio production, but also of big studios over small studios.

Yet she also notes that something about genre escapes the control of the studios, even the big studios — how?

SF GENRE 5: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GENRE?

Repressive Function of Genres (1)

Moine signals a divide within the study of genres:

“For some, genre expresses the desires, aspirations, and beliefs of the audience; for others, conversely, genre is a repressive structure of ideological containment that shapes and formats its viewers.”

While she takes seriously the idea that genres may have a socially repressive function, she wishes to complicate how we talk about the repressive function of genres. Thus she works through different models of the repressive function of genres.

Ideological containment

“Genre can be regarded as an effective instrument for ideological containment that imposes on viewers, through recurrent stereotyped stories, solutions that conform to social norms.”

But she notes that, in genre films, non-normative stances cannot be completely repressed. There is always something excessive, a return of what is repressed.

SF GENRE 5: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GENRE?

Repressive Function of Genres (2)

Collective expression

“Other functional theories, diametrically opposed to the preceding one, assert that genres offer, via their fictive stories, solutions to real world problems and inherent cultural tensions.”

In this approach, the repressive function of genre is imagined not in terms of containment but in terms of providing a feeling of participation without changing the rules of the game:

“... a genre’s success... depends on its ability to reshuffle the trump cards of the culture and its social organization without changing the game...”

In other words, genre has a ritual function.

SF GENRE 5: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GENRE?

Repressive Function of Genres (3)

In sum, she takes these two basic models for talking about the repressive function of genre seriously but she notes their limitations:

“The main objection that one could formulate against the conception of genre as an ideological yoke... is that it presupposes a passive spectator who unquestionably accepts the ideological prescriptions.”

“The approach to genre as ritual presents an analogous problem. ... to postulate a homogeneous audience... is an ethnocentric explanation...”

SF GENRE 5: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GENRE?

Communicative Function of Genres

Moine clearly thinks that considering the communicative function of genres will provide us a way to move beyond the limitations of the models based on productive and repressive functions. But she doesn't give us much to work with in this chapter.

She highlights how “genre organizes the frame of reference in which the film is viewed.”

Genres, then, “may be considered as useful guides or an obligatory route...”

She notes how “reviews of the film, and promotional discourse surrounding it, can emphasize one or more of its generic intentions...”

She notes how genres may either fulfill or frustrate audience expectations.

She gestures toward a more active role for audiences: “...a film's horizon of generic expectation is determined by two regimes of genericity: an authorial regime that proposes, and a spectatorial regime that disposes.”

SF GENRE 5: WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GENRE?

Conclusion

She concludes the chapter with two observations:

1. "...cinematic genre, whatever functions one imagines it has, is both a good and a bad object."
2. "...each genre and each generic reading must be considered in its context of production and reception."

MASHABLE

I want to introduce some factors that allow us to highlight more of the activity of audiences within the communicative function of genres.

1. Genre is hybrid. Every genre contains multiple genres.

SF may contain such genres as —

horror

fantastic

action / adventure

suspense

comedy

romance

voyage (quest and/or conquest)

documentary

social realism

cinema of ideas

2. Genres' codes can thus be pirated, repurposed, mashed.... especially through music cues and editing.

3. Genres may encourage audience participation and activity well beyond the cinema — although we might keep Moine's observation in mind that this may be both a good thing and bad thing.

der schweigende stern

Nach dem Roman „Planet des Todes“ von Stanislaw Lem

Für den Film bearbeitet von: J. Fehke, W. Kohlhausen, G. Räder, G. Röcker, A. Sasseck-Ferner, unter Mitarbeit des Regisseurs – Produktionsleitung: Hans Mohr, Edna Edmond, Zeynep – Kamera: Joachim Hander – Szenario/Regie: Ernst Krumpholtz und Yem Krumpholtz, Jon Olsson, Helmut Oswald – Bauten: Anatol Erdincioz, Alfred Hirschmeier – Ausstattung: L. Eskin, T. Mpirovik, J. Potocki, P. Lankmann, W. Schäfer, S. Ochs, A. Schütz – Musik: Andrzej Horowski – Kostüme: Etti-Charlotte Löffler – Masken: Altit Sossauer, Christa Oswald – Ton: Kurt Eppner, Werner Klais – Schnitt: Lena Neumann – Assistenzregie: Hans-Joachim Kasperik – Regieassistenten: Dora Erdmann, Herta-Joy Praybi – Kamera-Assistenten: Daniel Harald Staudtloger, Wolfgang Pethenheimer – Astronauten: Martin Sonntag, Henrik Selochet – Außenregisseur: Theo Görger, Oberleutnant: Herbert Leitzner

Regie: Kurt Moitzig

Es spielen:

- Die japanische Ärztin Yoko Tani
- Den amerikanischen Assenphysiker Olfrid Lukas
- Den polnischen Cheltingenieur Ignacy Mochowal
- Den afrikanischen Fernsichtschreiber Julius Gogewe
- Den sowjetischen Astronauten Michail N. Potinkow
- Den indischen Mathematiker Kurt Rodalman
- Den deutschen Piloten Günther Simon
- Den chinesischen Linguisten Tang Huofo
- Die Fernsehreporterin Lucina Wawidlo

sowie viele Darsteller aus verschiedenen Ländern und Roboter Omega

Eine Co-Produktion des VEB DEFA-Studio für Spielfilme, Gruppe „Katar Krasn“ und Film Pohl, Gruppe „Rajon“, im Verleih des VEB Progress Film-Vertrieb

PROGRESS
erlen
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14/60

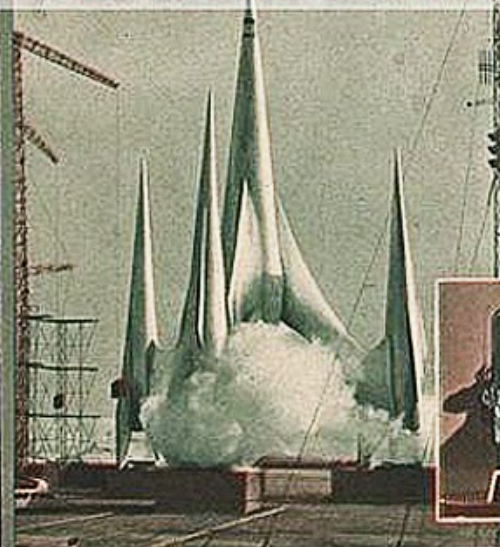


*Droht der Menschheit
Vernichtung?*

Unter der Leitung des sowjetischen Physikers Amersing erfordert eine internationale Mannschaft mit dem Raumschiff Komatrow 1 das Geheimnis der Venus. Den ersten schlagigen Erkenntnisbericht sehen Sie unter dem Titel „Der schweigende Stern“



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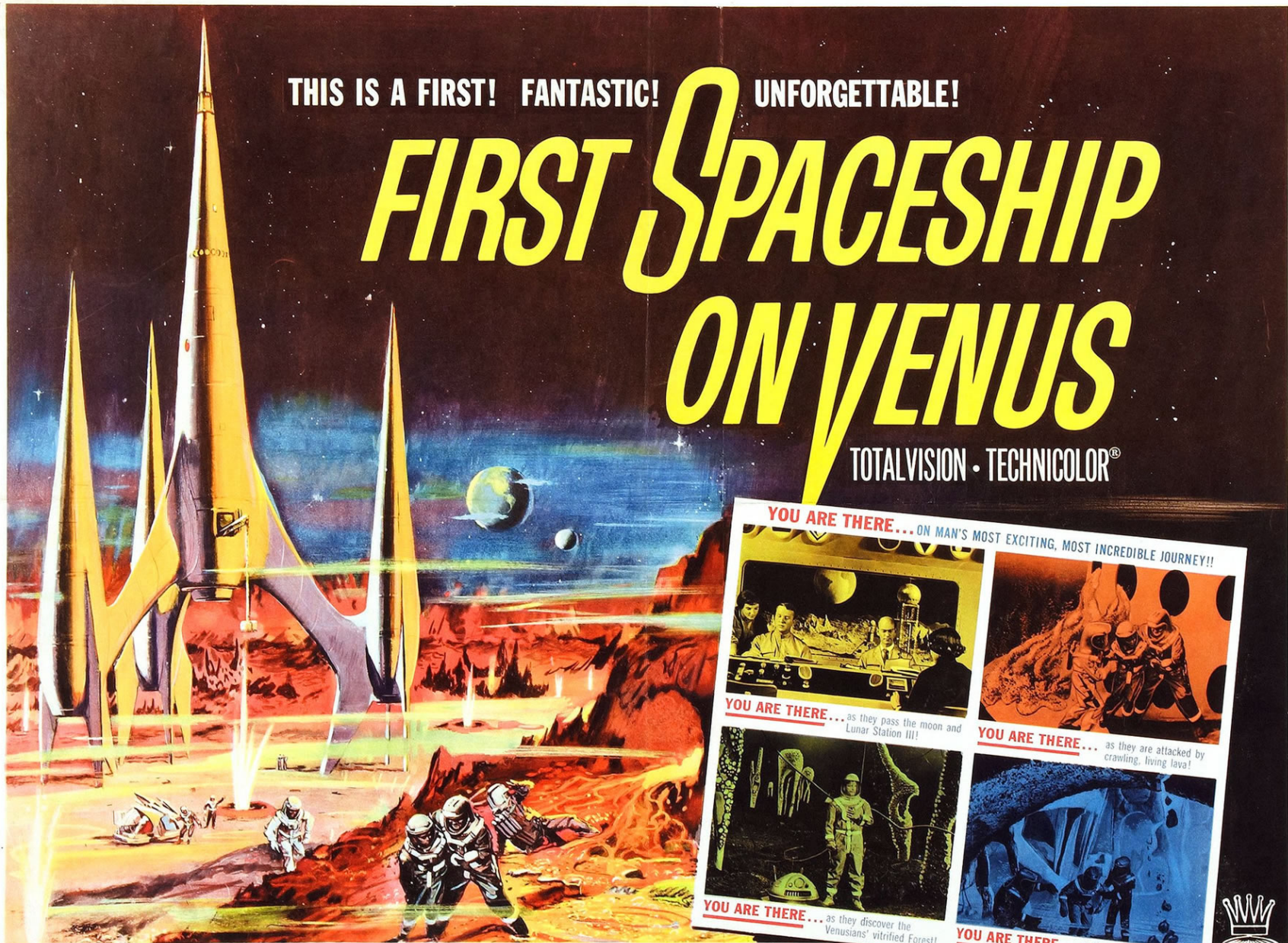
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FIRST SPACESHIP ON VENUS

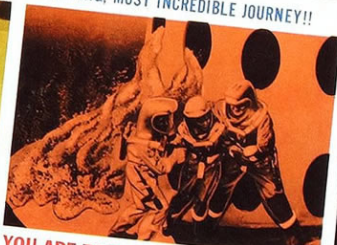
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YOU ARE THERE... as they discover the Venusians' vitrified Forest!



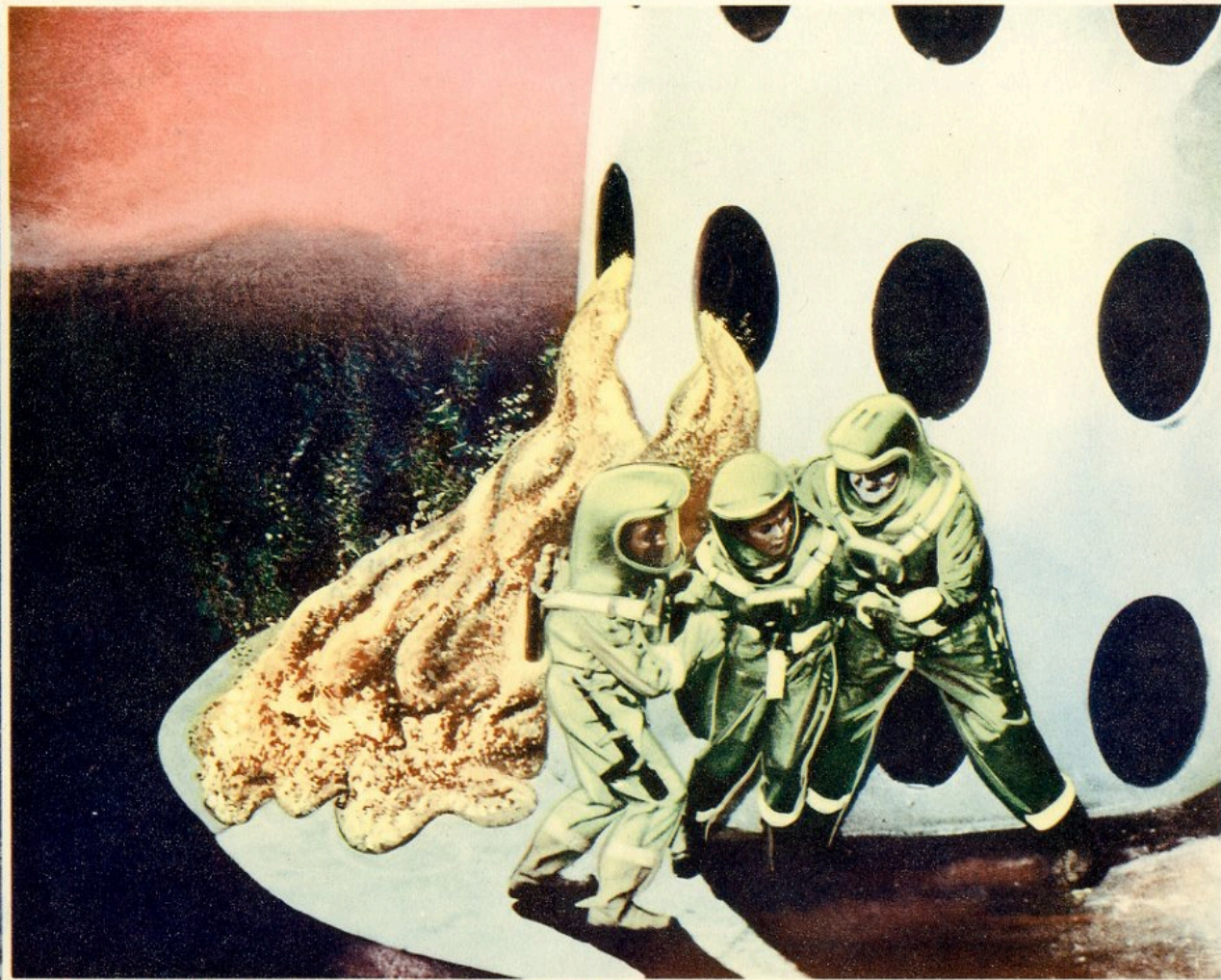
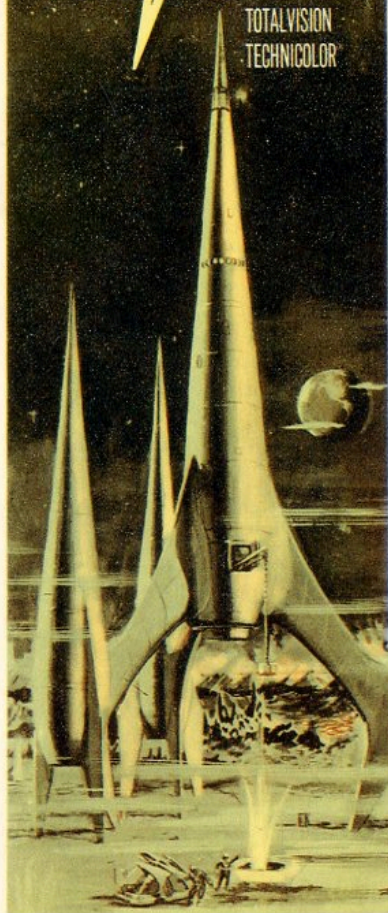
YOU ARE THERE... as they brave the raging irradiated Venusquake!

starring YOKO TANI · OLDRICK LUKES Directed by KURT MAETZIG · Written by JAMES FETHKE · A CENTRALA PRODUCTION · A CROWN-INTERNATIONAL RELEASE



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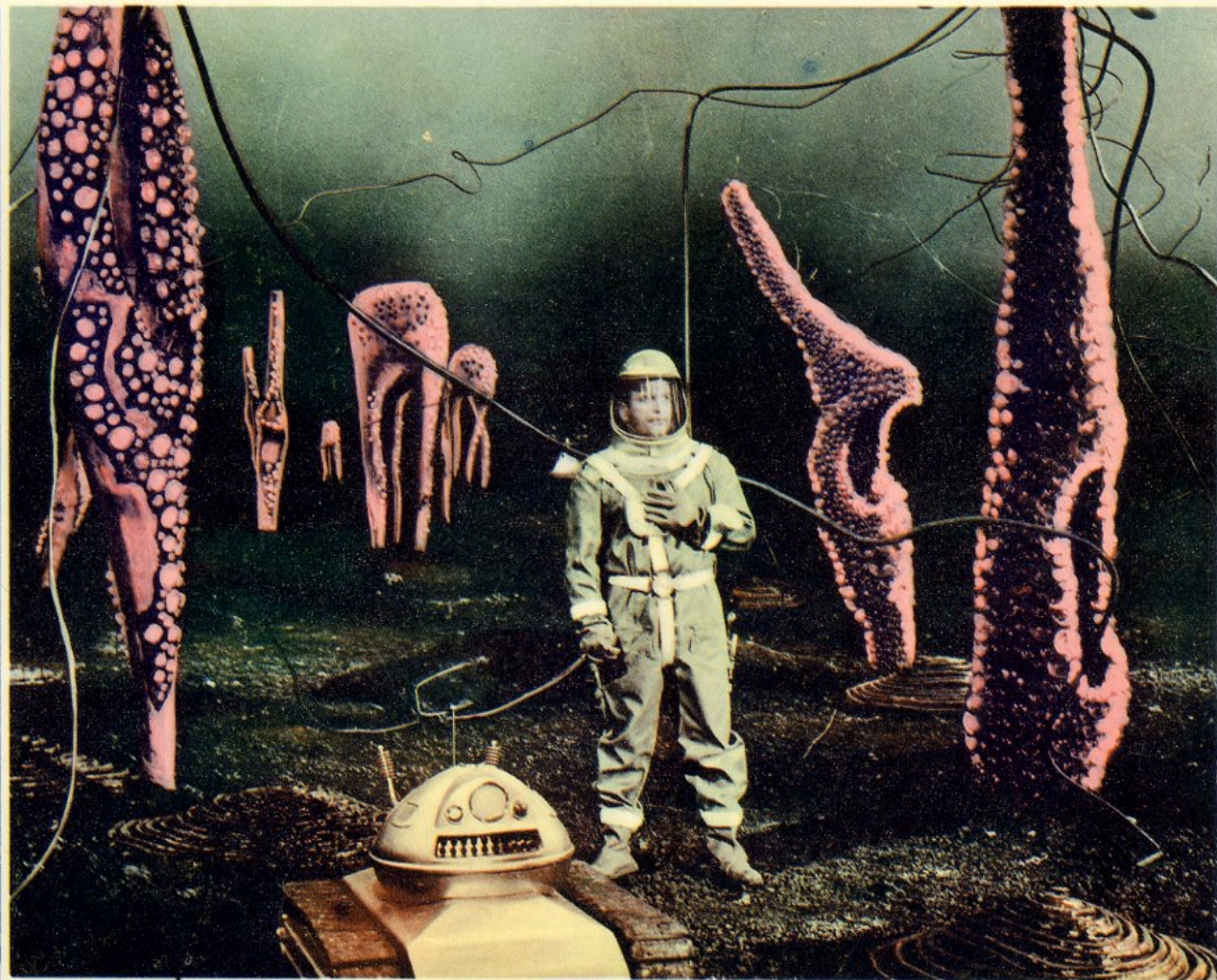
starring **YOKO TANI • OLDRICK LUKES**

Directed by **KURT MAETZIG** • Written by **JAMES FETHKE**
A CENTRALIA PRODUCTION



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A CROWN
INTERNATIONAL
RELEASE

LUNAR MODELS



THE

COSMOSTRATOR

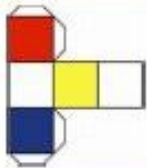


FROM **First Spaceship On Venus**

LIMITED EDITION 10 RESIN PIECES, KIT NO. SF028

XR

KEY



The Cosmostrator

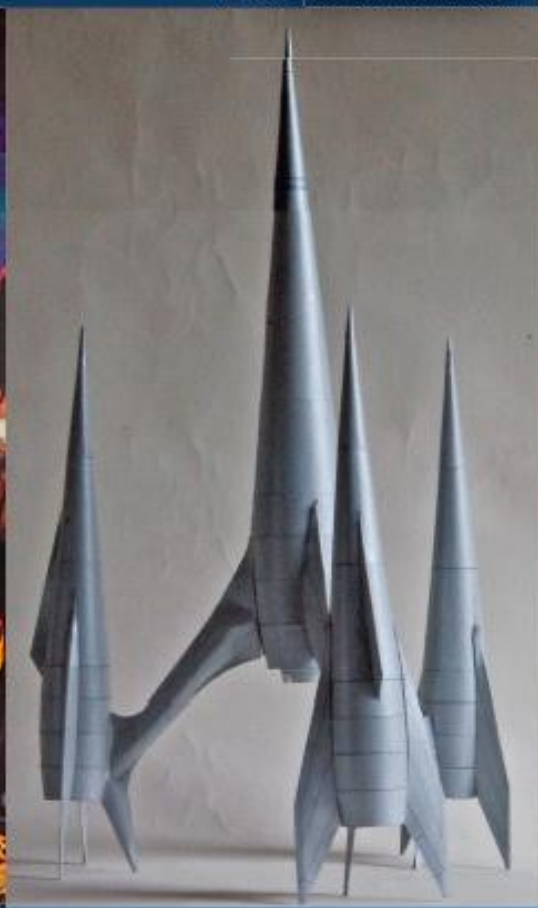
Jason Sutton's model of the vintage SF Venus spaceship

paper trade

komplettes Papiermodell: Kartonmodell



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scale

1:144

difficulty

4

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So how do we watch films with genre in mind?

SF GENRE: Back to Sontag

Maybe because she is writing at the time when these movies were being circulated and discussed, Sontag brings us closer to a more audience-orientated account of the SF genre. She is aware of their mode of address, how they speak to audiences.

She highlights tensions, polarizations, contradictions, and ambivalence, all of which imply a mode of address, a way of speaking to the audience. This approach acknowledges some degree of agency on the part of the audience.

urgency, disaster, crisis
dehumanization of self and others
hunger for a good war
profound dilemmas and anxieties
science is destruction

banality, everyday, offhand
drive for international unity
yearning for peace, for peaceful coexistence
moral simplification
science is salvation

Similar tensions run throughout *Silent Star* — and these social tensions are caught up with formal tensions and technological tensions as well as racial tensions.

It is such tensions that are pirated, remapped, repurposed, mashed, etc.

SILENT STAR: FORMAL TENSIONS

Like *Aelita*, the East German/Polish science-fiction co-production *Silent Star* uses remarkably different aesthetic styles to render its two worlds, Earth and Venus.

If we think in terms of narrative and attractions, for instance, the planets offer two distinctive ways of managing the relation between narrative and attraction.

In fact, *Star Star* repeats the formal tension that was so evident in *Aelita* — social realism versus avant-garde constructivism.

How does this contrast play out in *Silent Star*?

SOCIAL REALISM

“Socialist realism was the dominant aesthetic of Eastern Bloc drama between the early 1930s and the mid- to late 1950s. It stressed the nobility and stolidity of the worker and represented human feelings and interactions within overarching determinants of the class struggle and national political purpose (marginalising frivolity, constraining passion and emphasising sobriety). Dramatic scripting often sacrificed character ‘realism’ for didacticism, resulting in sustained declamatory passages, and any emotional exchanges were attenuated and overtly connected to issues of political struggle and judgment.” (Hayward and Lewandowski)

AVANT GARDE MUSIC (1)

“The late 1940s and early 1950s saw the rise of a new form of electro-acoustic sound composition in Europe that primarily utilised manipulated and/or collaged audiotape. This was an *avant garde* practice related to – but distinctly different from – modernist music. The pioneers of this style were Pierre Schaffer, who developed an approach known as *musique concrète* in Paris, and members of the Köln Elektronische Musik Studio in West Germany. Polish work in this field began in 1957 when Józef Patkowski and Krzysztof Szlifirski established a small facility at Polskie Radio (known as the Studio Eksperymentalne) during the period of (relative) liberalisation that occurred after Stalin’s death.” (Hayward and Lewandowski)

AVANT GARDE MUSIC (2)

“The Venusian soundworld is rich, complex and open to interpretation. Comprised of synthesised sounds and sound effects it is – in earthly terms, at least – unnatural. It can be interpreted, variously, as an ‘organic’ alien world where electronic and electronic-sounding elements comprise the sonic palette, as the diegesis of a depopulated world or, more apocalyptically, as a post-nuclear holocaust environment where the remnant natural sound world has been supplanted by an electronic pollution of all sound functions.” (Hayward and Lewandowski)

AVANT GARDE MUSIC (3)

“While the film is overtly didactic and stresses its specific ideologies and interpretations throughout the narrative, it is also open to interpretation as *escapist*. Its genre context allows the film, in its Venusian sequences at least, to revisit some of the very *avant gardism* of early Communist art that precipitated the socialist realist aesthetic as an attempt to restrict and channel all artistic expression to functional purposes.

...the sounds of planet Venus in the film are also, paradoxically, fertile, open-ended and optimistic, suggesting new possibilities for sonic experimentation and expression even within the heart of an intensely regulated cultural sector.” (Hayward and Lewandowski)

SILENT STAR: TECHNOLOGICAL TENSIONS

The West German title for *Silent Star* evokes *F.P.1* — “Spaceship Venus does not answer” (*Raumschiff Venus antwortet nicht*). Do similar tensions appear around telecommunications and transportation?



Kurt Maetzig, *Der Schweigende Stern/Milcząca Gwiazda* (Silent Star, 1960; East Germany, Poland)

SILENT STAR: RACIAL TENSIONS

Even Torner writes, *Silent Star* was “the world’s first film to feature a mixed-racial spaceship crew, in terms of socialist conceptions of race and gender. Director Kurt Maetzig conceptualized the expensive film, based on Stanislaw Lem novel *Astronauci* (1951), as an anti-racist epic leveled against nuclear war. Yet the resultant production made only tokenist attempts at integrating its multi-racial, multicultural cast into a believable, agentic space crew, remaining otherwise firmly entrenched in a German film tradition of racial performance and asymmetrical gender relations.”



Professor Arsenew
Soviet cosmonaut
(Michail N. Postnikow)

Omega
The Robot

Professor Saltyk
Polish chief engineer
(Ignacy Machowski)

Talua
African communications officer
(Julius Ongewe)

Raimund Brinkman
German pilot
(Günther Simon)

Professor Harringway Hawling
American commander
(Oldrich Lukes)

Dr. Chen Yu
Chinese linguist
(Tang Hua-Ta)

Dr. Sumiko Ogimura
Japanese medical officer
(Yoko Tani)

Professor Sikarna
Indian mathematician
(Kurt Rackelmann)

SILENT STAR: RACIAL TENSIONS

GDR 'utopian films' use the cinematic medium to project genuine hopes about future global diversity and progressive forces (pacifism, labor solidarity) overcoming vestiges from the past (imperialism, racism). Unfortunately, such representations also reveal the GDR's own troubled domestic and foreign record of racial practices.

It performs this by gathering multicultural ensembles around situations that, on the surface, appear to need a concerted, collective effort (i.e. resisting capitalism, exploration of new planets, etc.), but minorities within the collective are then tokenized or relegated to a position of minimal agency during key narrative moments. The message is twofold: white people ultimately possess greater knowledge and 'humanity' than non-whites, as well as the moral high ground for expressing 'tolerance' toward them. Space travel becomes a metonym for human civilization, and whites are portrayed as its leaders.

—Evan Torner

SILENT STAR: RACIAL TENSIONS

Talua thereafter plays the easy-going, Sambotype of communications technician, always ready to support the mission and work in concert with the other professors on the ship, particularly Arsenyev the patriarch. At the film's conclusion, he volunteers to be lowered into a shaft to reverse the polarity of a matter-energy device, somehow launching the Kosmokrator back into space and leaving him behind to die. But Talua's last take is not of heroism, it is of him running at the camera with his arms desperately raised, shouting about [his daughter] Mona. (...) He redeems blackness only by putting white socialists before his daughter and his own life.

—Evan Torner

SILENT STAR: RACIAL TENSIONS

... the solitary female crew member Sumiko has the triple representative burden of being a woman, Japanese, and the emotional core of the ship's crew in *Silent Star*. The result is what Soldovieri calls an 'iron virgin,' a sexually guarded, radioactively infertile woman whose compassion and caring comes closest to the semblance of a socialist nun (1998, 390). Her unrequited love for Brinkmann and angst over the Hiroshima tragedy motivates her throughout the picture, but her melodramatic situation forbids her from acting to remedy it. She is depicted as a subordinate caretaker of the crew, her make-up accentuates her racial difference, and her passion underscores the fact that she is a woman.

She exists to be pitied, seen, courted, and rescued by the male crewmembers. Her contorted visage dominates many close-ups and makes the male crewmembers' expressions of masculinity appear correspondingly rational and 'naturally' capable of handling the problems that arise. Sumiko's composite actions reveal not a character, but a male projection of an Asian female scientist.

—Evan Torner

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FIRST SPACESHIP ON VENUS

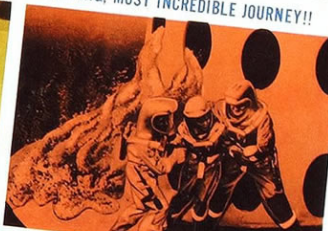
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FIRST SPACESHIP ON VENUS

The anonymous editors wrench the odd multi-racial composition of the cast into a 1960s American racial paradigm that alludes to a world of comparative 'racisms' (Hall 1996, 338). With respect to *Silent Star's* crude American appropriation, the DEFA's anti-racist project actually presents the modern viewer with multiple competent crew members of color who have a distinct voice and work well together. By contrast, *First Spaceship on Venus* transforms many main characters into marginal figures...

Her Hiroshima references are removed to render her simple eye-candy.

All of the crew members's nationalities remain unmentioned, taking an opposite route toward nationality from the internationalist original by simply assuming that all aboard are Americans. Thus Talua the African becomes Talua the African-American, and Arsenyev (renamed Dr. Harringway) thereby earns the right to harshly bark orders at him.

—Evan Torner



Star Trek: The Next Generation, 1987-94



Star Trek: Voyager, 1995-2001



Star Trek: Discovery, 2017-



The Little Mermaid, 1989





1991



The Lion King, 1994

SILENT STAR

Earth
social realism
subordination of attractions
documentary
cause and effect
narrative moves forward
communication is possible
mission, voyage, adventure
toward larger cosmic unity
racial equality

Venus
avant-garde techniques
'liberation' of sonic elements
animation: liberation of forms from physics
twisted cause and effect
retreat
communication is broken
failure
threat of annihilation of earth
racial sacrifice

FORM

NARRATIVE

TECHNO-SCIENCE

GEOPOLITICAL
RACIAL

DRAMA KOSMICKÉ LODI
IKARIE XB-1

Ikarie XB1
(1963; Czechoslovakia)

Based on Stanislaw Lem's
novel, *Magellanic Cloud*
(1955)

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ČESKÝ FILM

námět a scénář:

P. JURÁČEK J. POLÁK

režie:

JINDŘICH POLÁK

kamera:

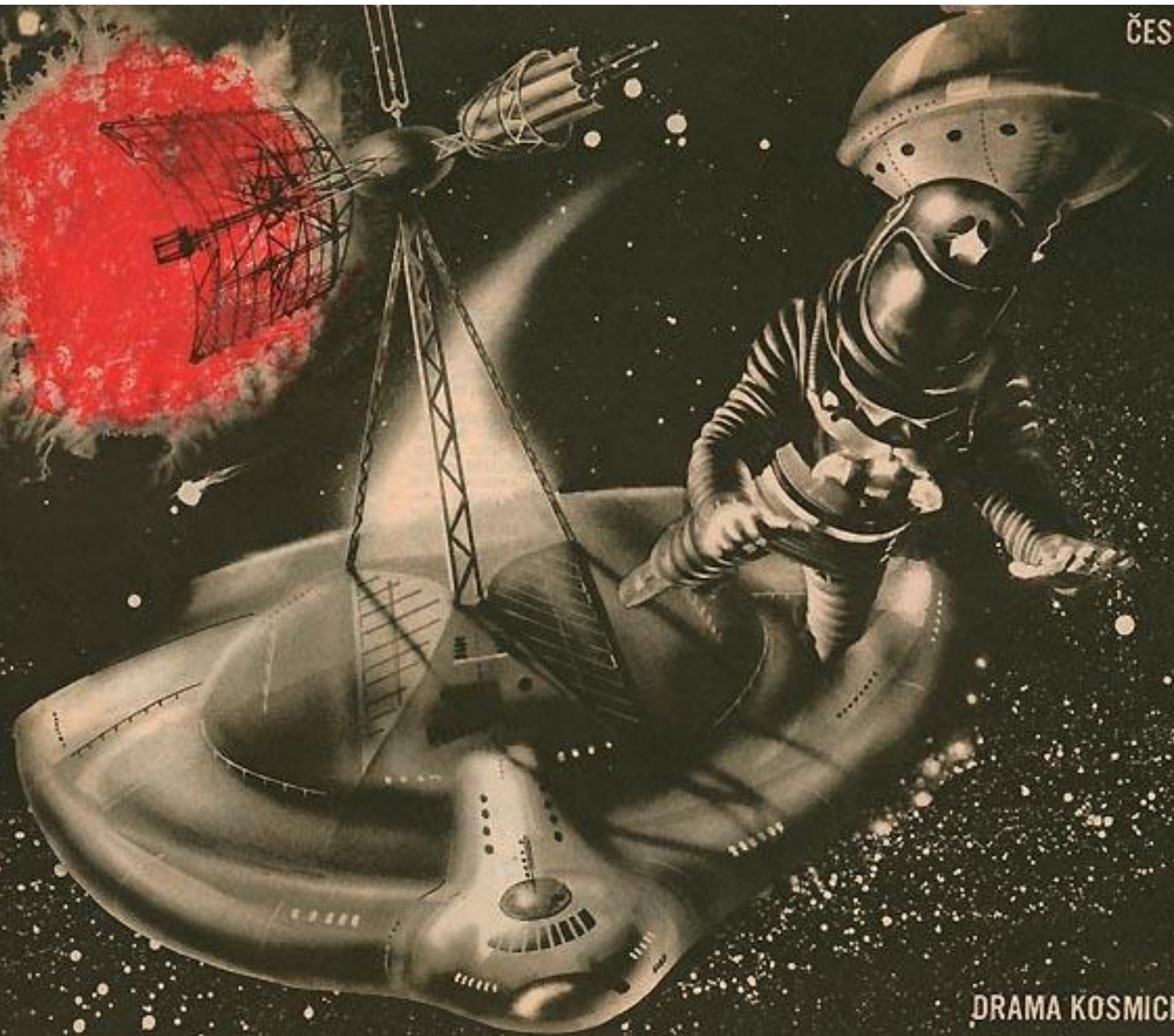
JAN KALIŠ

hudba:

ZDENĚK LIŠKA

HRAJÍ: nár. umělec Z. ŠTĚPANEK, nár. umělec F. SMOLÍK, D. MEDŘICKÁ, laureátka st. ceny KG, R. LUKAVSKÝ,
I. KAČIRKOVÁ, O. LACKOVIČ a j.

ČESKÝ FILM



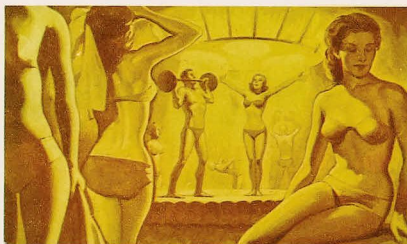
DRAMA KOSMICKÉ LODI

IKARIE XB-1

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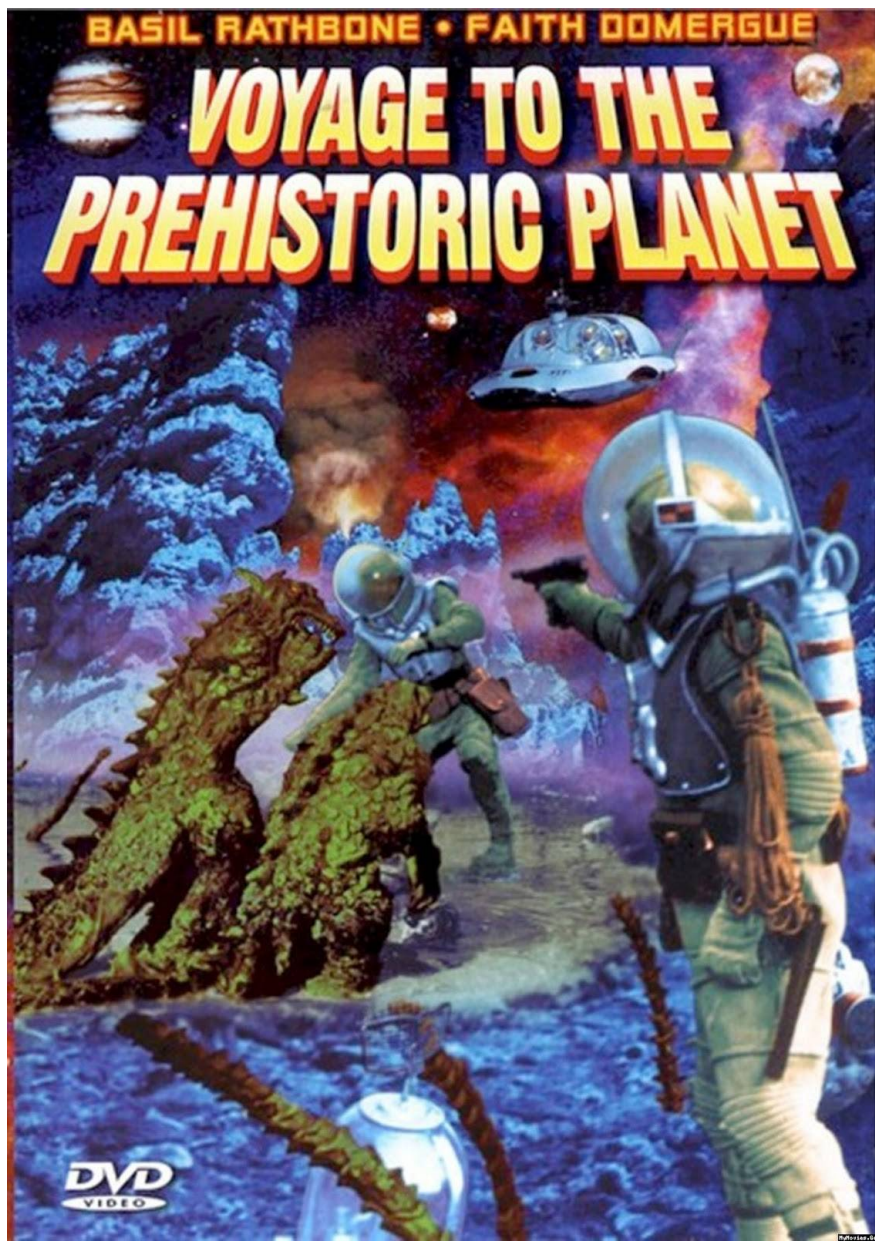
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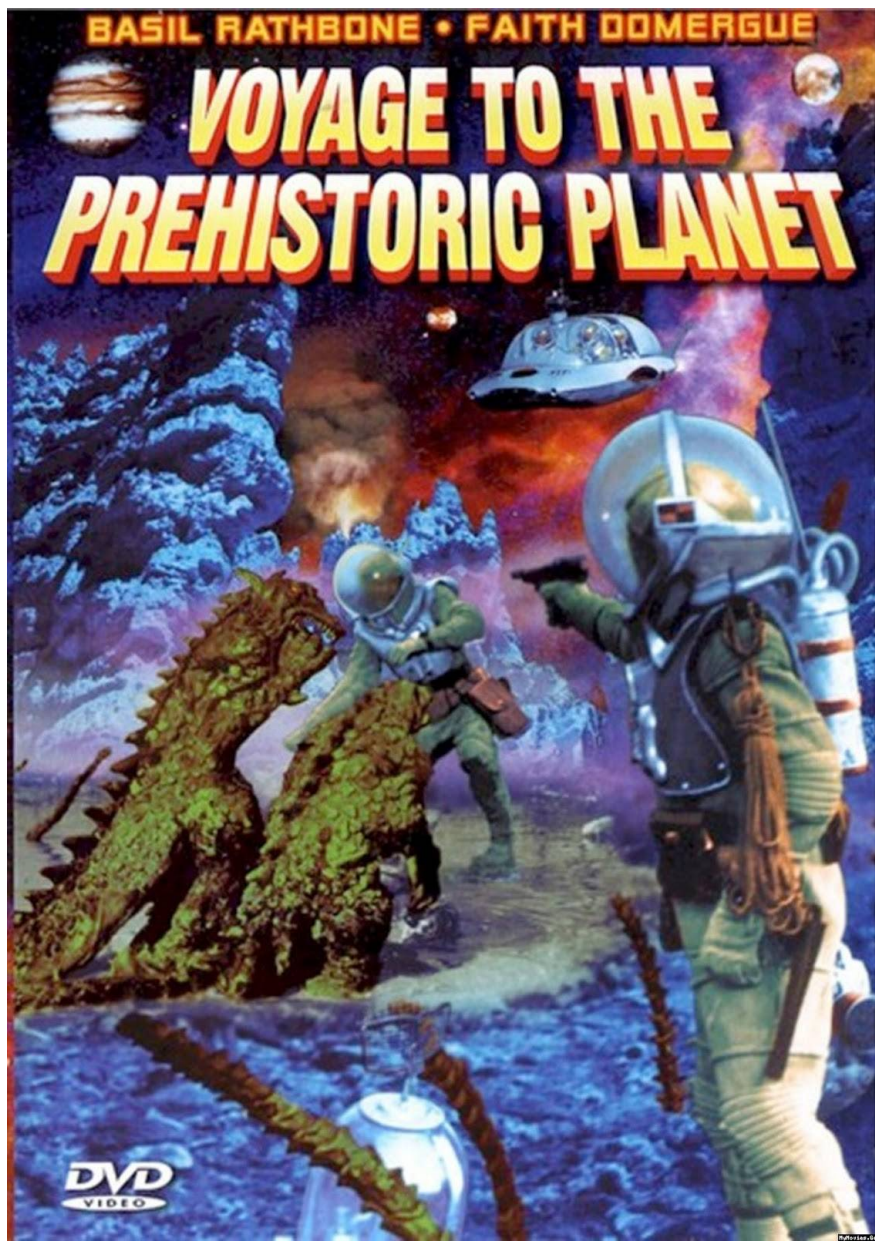


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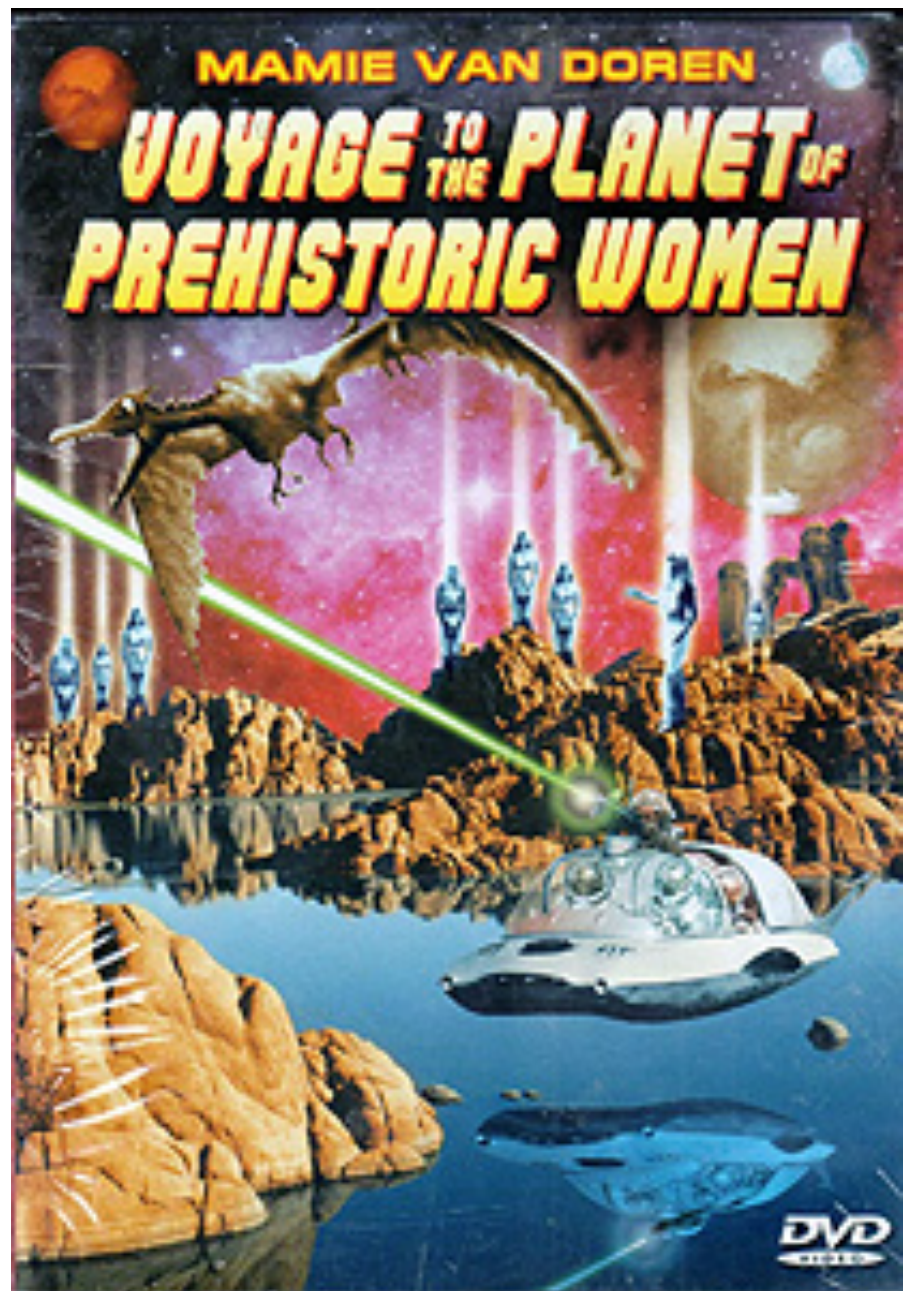
(Planet of Storms, 1962; Russia)



1965



1965



1968