

FILM 279 Worksheet 4

INVENTION FOR DESTRUCTION

The massive destruction due to worldwide war resulted in a widespread loss of faith in three things that had previously oriented political and social life: (1) nationalism, (2) science and technology, and (3) mass media. Because radio and cinema had been swept up into militarist and nationalist causes, mass-targeted media forms could no longer be taken as innocent entertainments or simple educational features. It is in such a context that Karel Zeman made his most famous film, *Vynález zkázy*, which literally means *Deadly Weapon*. It was distributed globally under the title *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*, but the film has recently been released with the title: *Invention for Destruction*.

1. Nationalism

2. Science and Technology

3. Mass Media

INVENTION FOR DESTRUCTION

4. Form

SF GENRE 1: SOBCHAK REVIEW

Vivian Sobchak argues that the iconic elements of SF films are 'plastic,' which for her means that they do not have the same meanings and narrative orientations from film to film.

—How does *Invention for Destruction* shift the meaning and narrative orientation of iconic SF elements?

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SF GENRE 2: SUVIN REVIEW

In his account of cognitive estrangement, Darko Suvin characterizes the 'scientific novels' of Jules Verne as 'extrapolative SF,' which involves "direct, temporal extrapolation [of contemporary technologies] and centered on sociological (i.e., utopian and anti-utopian) modeling."

—Does this characterization suit *Invention for Destruction*, or does the film go beyond extrapolation of contemporary technologies? How?

SF GENRE 3: FORTIN REVIEW

While David Fortin builds on Suvin's paradigm of cognitive estrangement, he argues that, because SF films are different from SF novels, we need to rethink and expand what counts as estrangement.

—What makes SF films different from SF novels for Fortin?

—How does 'home' or the 'zero world' become a foundational concept for him?

—What is the home or zero world in *Invention for Destruction*?

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SF GENRE 4a: SONTAG

Central to her discussion is a tension between the *banality* of the science fiction film and the *urgency* of the problems it alone deals with (the utter annihilation of the human, either physically or mentally).

—What makes SF fiction films different from SF novels for Sontag?

—What are some of the contradictions of SF films?

—Are similar contradictions at work in *Invention for Destruction*?

SF GENRE 4b: CSICSERY-RONAY

Csicsery-Ronay calls attention to the ways in which animation is not constrained by what we usually take to be the laws of physics. Animation, in his opinion, makes way for an imaginative or “lyrical physics” that estranges our everyday sense of physics.

—What sort of non-Newtonian physics is created in *Invention for Destruction*?

—What are the implications of its estrangement of the common-sense physics of both cinema and animation?

SF GENRE 4c: TIBBETTS

Due to his interest in steampunk, Tibbetts emphasizes *temporal strangeness* in the film: “...a ‘never-was’ converges with a ‘might-be’ (155).