

Strange Encounters

Paranoia and British Science Fiction Cinema

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The strange world of the British science fiction film...

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AUBIW5EWnI>



Science fiction as allegory

- Defining science fiction as a genre
- J.P. Telotte: encounters with alien worlds; the impact of science and technology; exploration in space and time; dystopian and utopian visions; predictions of the future; wonder, fantasy and horror
- Susan Sontag: 'The imagination of disaster' – science fiction films 'reflect world-wide anxieties'

Science fiction as allegory

- Vivian Sobchack: science fiction is always grounded in ‘the economic, technological, political and linguistic present of its production’
- Therefore, science fiction is about the anxieties of today
- But is this changed by the national culture we live in?

American science fiction in the 1950s

- What is 1950s America worried about?
- Communist infiltration from within
- Invasion from outside
- Nuclear war/destruction
- Nuclear contamination – ecological issues

American anxieties

- Invasion:
- *War of the Worlds* (1953)
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM3PX_GiYHo
- Infiltration:
- *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLsjlmrQ6Mw>
- Nuclear contamination:
- *Them!* (1954)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4URRp39XOo>

1950s and 1960s British science fiction cinema: context

- A mini boom in British science fiction films inspired by earlier American examples
- Production: low budget, B movies made by small independents
- Some are backed and distributed by American majors
- But in what ways are the British films distinctive?

Village of the Damned (1960)

Directed by Wolf Rilla from John Wyndham's novel

Invasion and infiltration by a 'foreign' force

Hosted by the young women

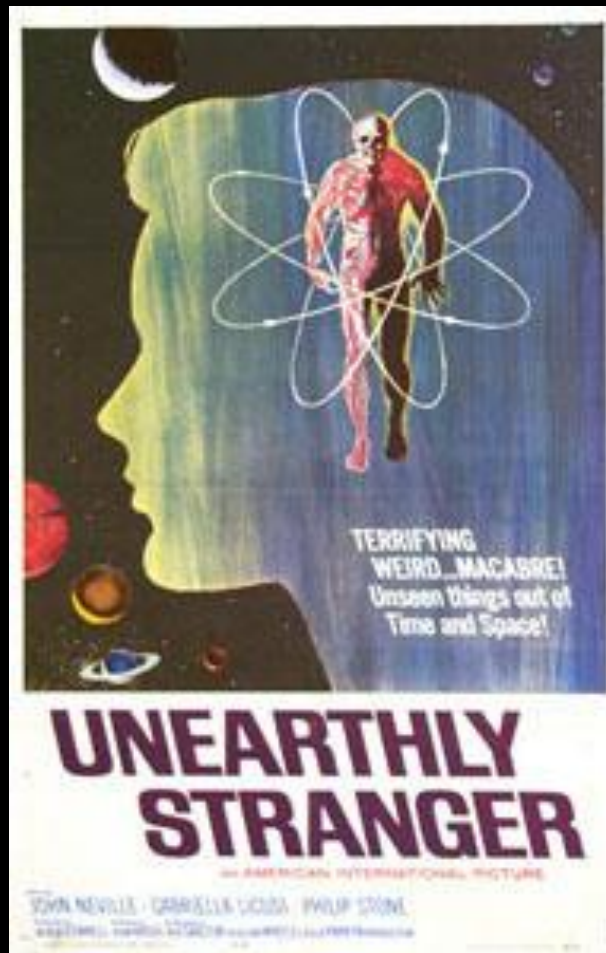
And embodied by children

Officialdom can't help

The setting is a sleepy village

The weapon is thought control: an Aryan master race

Unearthly Stranger (1963)



Unearthly Stranger

- Directed by John Krish
- Invasion and infiltration
- Dangerous meddling by scientists
- The threat is embodied in a young woman
- Danger is within the suburban home and a 'normal' marriage
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fEwK5lzd9g>

The Day the Earth Caught Fire (1961)



The Day the Earth Caught Fire (1961)

- Nuclear catastrophe caused by weapons testing
- Soviets and US to blame
- British stoicism – retreat to the pub!
- Anarchy and social collapse
- Ambiguous ending
- Everyday life goes on at the *Daily Express*
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLxori1cf-0>

The Day of the Triffids (1962)



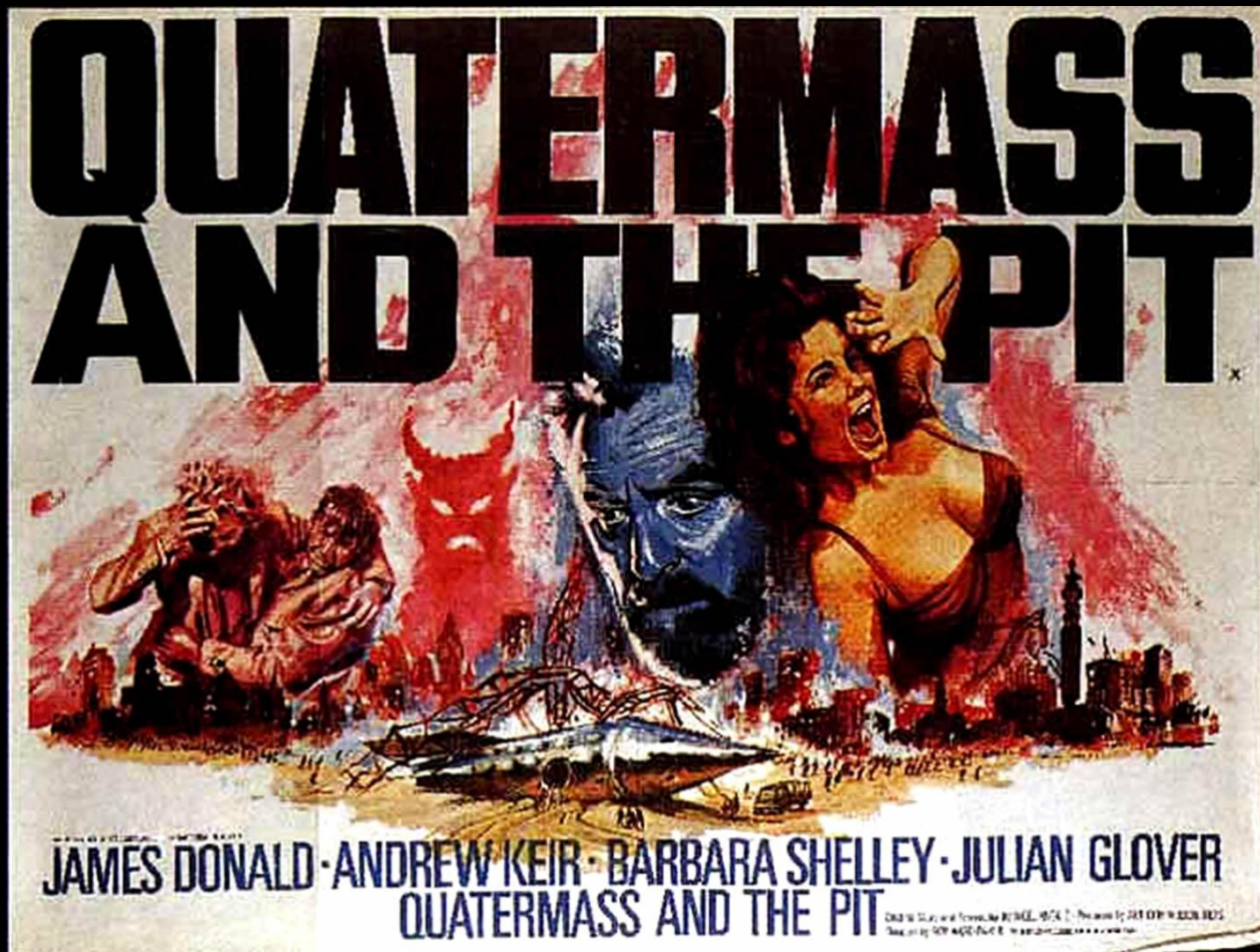
The Day of the Triffids (1962)

- Another John Wyndham adaptation
- Mysterious ‘foreign’ forces at work
- Physical disability: blindness
- The dangerous urban space and civil unrest
- Officialdom can’t help
- Scientific meddling: nature rebels
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FqrLqg3w6AU>

The Night of the Big Heat (1967)

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qk2TZ_LbNzA
- The horror of the mundane
- The pub as refuge
- Dangerous women
- Scientific meddling produces ecological disaster – warm weather!
- Invasion – nature to the rescue

Quatermass and the Pit (1967)



Quatermass and the Pit (1967)

- Written by Nigel Kneale; the final part of a trilogy; originally made for television; a Hammer film
- Uncomprehending officialdom, including the army
- Ambiguous presentation of scientists
- Women as 'other'
- Outside forces that are modern and ancient
- Danger in the everyday – a London tube station
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XTiZJFRRlwE>

The British dimension

- Fear of nuclear war between America and the Soviet Union
- Ecological disaster
- Failure of the authorities
- Ambiguous view of science
- Fear of the young and of women: postwar anxiety
- Civil unrest in the city and hidden danger in the countryside
- Danger lurks in the mundane