

A

FUTURE

HISTORY

Introduction

The following essay interrogates the script I am currently writing for a feature length film. This film builds on some pre existing works I have made that take place within the same alternate reality, that is an allegorical version of our own.

I: *THE HIERARCHY OF EXISTENCE*

The Digital

In *Divided Together* the digital world is explored as an integral element how power is both exercised and succumbed to. Every scene of the film shows an interaction between the characters and digital technology, ranging from flipping through photographs of an unseen son, to drone strikes to an unseen enemy. All this is done through a form of digital detachment from physical reality that begins to degrade the central character and this mask he wears.

Fig.1

We now live in a panopticon of information surveillance that we have mostly willingly subscribed. I gave my thumb print to my new phone only last week, another part of my information capital hosted in storage. My thumb print can join the party with my banking information, location, online friend group, with an archive of my fears, desires and curiosities stored all in the cloud and easily accessible by those who own it. This information is prime for material for subtly manipulating us into doing, thinking and being. I feel that the digital has become a new higher form of accessible consciousness, and I want the film to show that.

“The greater power is, the more quietly it works. It just happens: it has no need to draw attention to itself.” - Byung-chulhan, *Psycho-politics*

I feel we exist and experience the world in hierarchical layers. The top layer of the hierarchy of existence is the Digital world, with Data accumulation being the most significant aspect of this.



This data is a form of total control and surveillance, the ultimate in silent power. The algorithms constant storage is always in motion and most people born today will generate more capital in their life through their own harvested information.

The Physical

In the film the next layer of the hierarchy is that of the physical. This is how we exist in time and how we spend it, but also our conscious thoughts.

In divided together the physical Labour of the politicians consists of the characters moving between a series of simulated environments having meaningful and fake conversations, and interacting with technology. The film attempts to show the total detachment the characters have from each other and their actions.

The Subconscious

The final layer is below, like the digital it is not something we are fully aware of but influences and controls our actions.

In a textbook freudian sense the central character, The Leader, reveals himself through his dreams. These dreams portray his fears and doubts about the true nature of his actions and consequences that they have. One scene combines two digital interactions, the drone strike and the photographs of the distant son into a dream sequence In which the leader walks through a empty desert and finds his young son playing in the sand. The desert is reference to the locations

of the drone strike and shows that despite the previous lack of empathy in the mechanical murder, he does have a sense of the magnitude of the action.

World on a Wire (1973) by Rainer Werner Fassbinder explores a company that has created a sophisticated simulated reality for marketing purposes, utilising data to explore the best possible financial outcomes for them. I feel it's very prescient regarding what has been going on for some time now, but has only become recently commonly known with the data harvesting scandal. The film also takes place in a series of layers as the central character moves down into different simulated worlds.



II: THE DETAILS OF EMPIRE

Every scene in the film is based on a historical event, with it recreated in a fictional setting. This is about how reality and simulation of reality have become increasingly indistinguishable. A good example of this is the is a scene in which as drone strike is used as after dinner entertainment, a true exercise in the banality of evil. This is based on a real event that took place at Donald Trumps mar o Lago golf resort come hotel, where him and his cronies vacation. In a sea of so many absurdities and perversities this dark action became a neglected event in the media. The event has therefore become a minor detail in the exercise of empire.



“There is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental, it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canon of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgments it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analysed. All these attributes of authority apply to orientalism” - Edward Said, *Orientalism*

In *Divided Together* the legacy of empire and colonialism is deeply explored. In one scene you see the Leader make an address to a recently invaded foreign country with deep colonial undercurrent in the use of terminology. The subtitles of his speech are in Sabaen an ancient south Arabian language dead for over 2000 years. The film takes place in an alternate reality where that is the prominent language in the region they have invaded, through this unrecognisable text it shows how alien his words are but also makes the accepted familiar become strange. This scene is inspired by a speech made by Tony Blair to the people of Iraq after the 2003 invasion that was screened on tv there. I find it interesting because the tone and delivery is both absurd and dark.

I then continued with this by making a video installation that explores from a different perspective the same fictional war. The video installation *I declare a thumb war* (2018) takes a found image as its starting point. The original photograph depicts a soldier from the so-called war on terror era, playing a friendly “thumb war” game with a child. The video restaged this state-sanctioned image, a false utopian ideal and propaganda fantasy, and departs from it by situating it in an alternate reality.

I declare a thumb war considers the long history of narrative falsehoods and simplification of complexities, described by Edward said as Orientalism, perpetuated by the west in order to dominate other cultures. The work attempts to elevate the significance of the source photograph, a symbolic detail of empire, by situating it within an alternate reality moving in two conflicting time zones. The characters perform in slow motion while the passage of time is exemplified through an

accelerated time-lapse of the sun moving over them. The work is, like the photograph, an absurd fiction in which two sides must repetitively clash

“It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges subsist here and there, in the deserts which are no longer those of the empire, but out own. The desert of the real itself.” - Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*.



III: LAYERS OF TIME

The Past

“The last thing we want is to go back to the bad old days, the days we all wish to forget” - The Leader

Manipulation and distorted versions of the past are an essential element of all governments. As Churchill said “History will be kind to me, for I intend to write it.”. The government in *Divided Together* have written history to their benefit, with the characters being the new generation who have inherited the power and believe the fictional past.

The way they speak about the past in *Divided Together*, is one of regret for what came before them, and pride for what came after. As what came after was them, and therefore something to be

praised. It's impossible to say whether they are an improvement on the past as they are unreliable narrators of their own state.

The Present

The film is told from present perspective, where the characters exist. However, the layers of time are constantly referenced with each scene mentioning time either as a term of phrase or more specifically.

“the clock represents an element of mechanical tyranny in the lives of modern men more potent than any individual exploiter or any other machine” - George Woodcock, The Tyranny of the Clock

The Future

Throughout the film there is references to them forging what they call 'The New Future'. The New Future is another absurd term used by The Party as all future is inherently new, and by being aware of this they cease to forge anything.

“A man who has become conscious of the absurd is forever bound to it. A man devoid of hope and conscious being has ceased to belong to the future” - Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus

There is nothing new about the ideas of the so-called movement they are building. Maintaining power is the ultimate objective and everything spoken and done is just in service to that.

The film starts with an excerpt of the speech being spoken by The leader, he speaks into the camera with articulate confidence. As the camera pans out it is revealed to be a playback on a TV of a recording that is then critiqued by his inner circle.

IIII: POLITICS OF FILMMAKING

Cinema like government relies on manipulation. You manipulate audience, time, actors and crew and this process like all governments is inherently hierarchical.

The role of the director making a film is like the system of the state, every action must serve it so as to progress it. Politicians are actors, their job is to read from the prewritten script and play their part. Actors must serve the film, politicians must serve the state.

“We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you are studying that reality—judiciously, as you will—we'll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that's how things will sort out. We're history's actors, and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do.” - Karl Rove, American Republican political consultant and policy advisor.

Every scene in the film make reference to the filmmaking process, from references to “sticking to the script”, or my voice as director shouting a countdown till live.



V: DICHOTOMIES & DUALITY

Black and white / Colour

Inside / Outside

Reality / Simulation

Inner / Outer experience

VI: SUNBURST OF AMBIGUITY

The symbol of The Party in Divided Together is that of half a sun burst. It's not clear if this is a setting or rising sun. This is reflected in the ideologically ambiguous political government who seem to occupy spaces that could be interpreted as left, right, centre and even up, down and around. Their beliefs are like their symbol, ultimately totally generic and could be applied to any government.

The concept of the sun, rising and falling, creating night and day is one of the first concepts that humans understood. It was also one of the first symbols depicted by humans in caves, and was integral part of earliest forms of storytelling such as religion and mythology. Just as icarus flew too close to the sun and burned his wings, The Leader will also get burned.

Ideologies typically used to operate under symbols, but now we live in an age where the dominant ideology of neoliberalism has no specific symbol or visual identity. This is part of what makes it a silent power, it exists but it's hard to see.

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