

## The Alien as a Vehicle for Cosmopolitan Discourses: The Case of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*

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This article looks at the remake of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Derrickson 2008) as a representative example of a group of early twenty-first century science fiction films that have shown remarkable interest in transnational and global phenomena. Given the recent emphasis of the genre on these issues, this article proposes cosmopolitanism as a particularly useful theoretical framework for analyzing contemporary science fiction. The article focuses on the remake's reliance on the figure of the alien and its destructive potential as a means of drawing attention to the global threat of climate change. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* presents cosmopolitanism as a perspective and way of acting that develops as a response to specific transnational challenges.

Keywords: *The Day the Earth Stood Still*; science fiction; film; cosmopolitanism; alien; climate change

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## Lo alienígena como vehículo de discursos cosmopolitas: el caso de *Ultimátum a la Tierra*

Este artículo ofrece un análisis de la nueva versión de *Ultimátum a la Tierra* (Derrickson 2008) como representativa de un grupo de películas de ciencia ficción de principios del siglo XXI que muestran especial interés en fenómenos transnacionales y globales. Debido al reciente énfasis de la ciencia ficción en estos temas, el artículo presenta el cosmopolitismo como una herramienta teórica particularmente útil para el análisis de la ciencia ficción contemporánea. El artículo se centra en el uso de la figura del alienígena y su potencial destructivo como forma de dirigir la atención hacia la amenaza global del cambio

climático. Por último, sugiere que *Ultimátum a la Tierra* presenta el cosmopolitismo como una perspectiva y un modo de actuar que surge en respuesta a desafíos transnacionales específicos.

Palabras clave: *Ultimátum a la Tierra*; ciencia ficción; cine; cosmopolitismo; alienígena; cambio climático

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to science fiction (SF) film classics such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel 1956) that have been remade multiple times over the decades (Kaufman 1978; Ferrara 1993; Hirschbiegel 2007), fifty-seven years passed between the release of the original version of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* directed by Robert Wise in 1951 and its 2008 remake by Scott Derrickson.<sup>1</sup> The fact that *The Day* has been remade at a time—the early twenty-first century—when SF cinema is exhibiting a particularly strong investment in discourses on globalization and cosmopolitanism invites us to analyze how the remake reworks some of the cosmopolitan tropes in the earlier film in order to articulate contemporary transnational concerns. Although the more recent version of *The Day* has not been as widely lauded as the original, it is worthy of study because it is representative of two key trends in contemporary SF cinema: it is an example of both the growing number of films that imagine dialogic and mutually-beneficial relations between aliens and humans at the turn of the twenty-first century, and also of films that deal with planetary environmental concerns, particularly with the devastating effects of climate change. Other similar films such as *Avatar* (Cameron 2009) and *Godzilla* (Edwards 2014) feature a more incomplete presence of the cosmopolitan outlook of contemporary SF cinema. Indeed, *Avatar* barely explores the global dimension of its environmental discourse and *Godzilla* presents only a limited avenue for communication between its monster and humans. The cultural and generic importance of the remake of *The Day* lies in the fact that, through its participation in the two aforementioned strands, it offers a comprehensive picture of some of the main cosmopolitan concerns of contemporary SF cinema. As such it will be analyzed here.

This article first considers the unusual cosmopolitan tone of the original film in order to explore its relationship with the remake, albeit primarily focusing on the more recent version and its ability to reshape the cosmopolitan outlook of the 1951 film. Cosmopolitan theory offers a particularly useful framework of analysis because the cosmopolitan, in contrast to the transnational or the global, does not simply describe realities that transcend the framework of the nation. Cosmopolitanism offers a critical perspective from which to interpret transnational and global phenomena (Delanty 2012, 42). This critical dimension is primarily based on human rights, openness towards difference and environmental ethics. Cosmopolitanism is also useful to critique the impact of globalized neoliberalism on human lives thanks to the centrality of well-being and decent life conditions to this theoretical framework (Appiah 2006, 167). However, for purposes of clarity, this article focuses on openness and its relationship with cosmopolitan transformation. In this sense, Gerard Delanty's work is central to the approach employed here. Delanty describes cosmopolitanism as “an ethical and political

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medium of societal transformation that is based on the principle of world openness” (2009, 53). That is, cosmopolitanism is grounded on the willingness to interact with the Other and “gain distance from one’s own culture in order to accommodate the perspective of the Other” (130). In other words, cosmopolitanism describes a receptive attitude towards the different perspectives of other cultures and societies, the practice of dialogue with the Other, and the possible changes that derive from these experiences as a way of striving—often in an unsteady, irregular manner—towards conviviality, mutual benefit and sustainability in transnational contexts (Kendall, Woodward and Skrbish 2009, 105-107; Delanty 2012, 40-2; Papastergiadis 2012, 117, 129). Even though this may appear to idealize cosmopolitan theory, cosmopolitan discourses and actions tend to be intermittent and ambivalent, as Zlatko Skrbish and Ian Woodward—among others—note (2013, 26, 116). Looking at the remake of *The Day* through a cosmopolitan lens, this article shows how it subverts threatening images of aliens, questions geopolitical and ecosystemic supremacy and advocates dialogic relations between humans and aliens as a path towards cosmopolitan changes that might reduce anthropogenic ecological threats at a global level.

## 2. TRANSNATIONAL SCIENCE FICTION AND COSMOPOLITANISM

The recent focus of scholars such as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay (2002; 2012), Mark Bould (2012, 177-195), Sherryl Vint (2012; 2016) and others on discourses on globalization in SF and the publication of the volumes *Alien Imaginations. Science Fiction and Tales of Transnationalism* (Küchler, Maehl and Stoutt 2015) and *Simultaneous Worlds. Global Science Fiction Cinema* (Feeley and Wells 2015) evince the centrality of global issues in current understandings of the SF (film) genre. Like globalization, the alternative worlds of SF combine and reconfigure spatial and temporal dimensions. The boundless imagination of the genre also allows it to project geopolitical formations that express current socioeconomic trends and craft metaphors for emerging modes of transnational bonds. Its imagination of disaster also visualizes the transnational impacts of environmental degradation. In addition, SF narratives often revolve around two key elements of globalization: technology, which is central to global communications and mobility, and borders: human / non-human, Earth / outer space, upper-class / lower-class, humanity / technology, physical / virtual. David Higgins has also argued that the generic ability of SF to articulate imperial and colonial fantasies allows the genre to “extrapolate cosmopolitan alternatives to imperial domination” (2011, 332). As he suggests, many contemporary SF films expose abusive relations of power at a supranational level and explore, at least in part, cosmopolitan notions.

Although some twenty-first century SF films such as *Avatar* (Cameron 2009) and *Jupiter Ascending* (Wachowski and Wachowski 2015) channel cosmopolitan discourses through their depiction of neocolonial practices in alternative universes, other recent productions explore several additional paths to convey cosmopolitan concerns.

For example, *Elysium* (Blomkamp 2013) denounces the bordering of the benefits of modernity and the violation of human rights by global, neoliberal, public-private partnerships; *In Time* (Nicol 2011) condemns the system of economic extraction from which global financial firms benefit; *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich 2004), 2012 (Emmerich 2009) and *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon-ho 2013) highlight the planetary dimension of climate change and explore the biopolitics of catastrophe; *Code 46* (Winterbottom 2003), *Sleep Dealer* (Rivera 2008) and *District 9* (Blomkamp 2009) point at the critical situation of many migrants and refugees; *Africa Paradis* (Amoussou 2006), *Upside Down* (Solanas 2012) and *The Host* (Nicol 2013) consider the role of transnational or human/alien love in the flourishing of cosmopolitan sensibilities; and *Cloud Atlas* (Tykwer, Wachowski and Wachowski 2012) and *I Origins* (Cahill 2014) trace personal connections, influences and alliances across time and space as a way of reflecting on the idea of cosmopolitan empathy. Although earlier films such as *When Worlds Collide* (Maté 1951), *Rollerball* (Jewison 1975), *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982) and *The Matrix* (Wachowski and Wachowski 1999) also set their narratives in contexts of transnational socioeconomic connections and ecological impacts, more recent films tend to make transnational links evident in their stories, not only conceptually but also visually and narratively. The proliferation of this kind of SF films at the turn of the twenty-first century makes cosmopolitan theory a particularly fitting prism from which to interpret such texts.

As mentioned above, the remake of *The Day* offers a useful gateway to the workings of two of the key strands of cosmopolitan SF cinema. Although a growing number of films present sympathetic portraits of aliens, it is also true that there has been a proliferation of alien invasion films and TV series in the years following the 9/11 attacks which have acted as a vehicle for “anxieties concerning terrorism” (Higgins 2015, 45-46), and indeed continue to do so in the current climate of global ISIS-related terrorism. *Signs* (Shyamalan 2002), *War of the Worlds* (Spielberg 2005), *The Invasion* (Hirschbiegel 2007), *Cloverfield* (Reeves 2008), *Battle LA* (Liebesman 2011), *Edge of Tomorrow* (Liman 2014), *The 5th Wave* (Blakeson 2016) and *Independence Day: Resurgence* (Emmerich 2016) are prominent examples of the warmongering, destructive or deceiving character of contemporary aliens. Yet other early twenty-first century films—especially since the late 2000s—have cast a more positive light on human-alien relations and frame contacts (and clashes) between different species through a cosmopolitan lens. In *Transformers* (Bay 2007), *Avatar* (Cameron 2009), *District 9* (Blomkamp 2009), *Planet 51* (Blanco 2009), *Monsters* (Edwards 2010), *Super 8* (Abrams 2011), *Paul* (Mottola 2011), *I Am Number Four* (Caruso 2011), *Upside Down* (Solanas 2012), *Ender's Game* (Hood 2013), *The Host* (2013), *Earth to Echo* (Green 2014), *Guardians of the Galaxy* (Gunn 2014), *Home* (Johnson 2015) and *Arrival* (Villeneuve 2016) aliens appear as beings that are better than humans at living in harmony with their natural environment, beings who seek refuge on Earth, peaceful visitors, allies willing to share their knowledge and strength, victims of human exploitation, or victims of humans' violent overreaction

to fear. These aliens are often harmless and well-intentioned. Sometimes they even get involved in romantic relationships with humans, mirroring 1970s and 1980s films such as *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (Roeg 1976) and *Cocoon* (Howard 1985). Some of these recent aliens also help humans to see their own society and environment from a different—cosmopolitan—perspective. Such is the case in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

Regarding the emphasis of SF cinema on the cosmopolitan character of contemporary environmental challenges, *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich 2004), *The World Sinks Except Japan* (Kawasaki 2006), *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Derrickson 2008), *2012* (Emmerich 2009), *Snowpiercer* (Bong Joon-ho 2013), *Elysium* (Blomkamp 2013) and *Godzilla* (Edwards 2014) are key examples of films that offer critical portraits of the environmental consequences of the hegemony of the global, late-capitalist economy, and which present ecological challenges that require transnational (re)actions. Despite the seemingly mindless spectacles of disaster in some of these films, they cultivate what for Ursula Heise is an essential element of eco-cosmopolitanism: “a sense of planet,” that is, an awareness of the transnational impact of processes of extraction, production and disposal (2008, 56). A “sense of planet,” then, contributes to giving visibility to the hidden environmental and social costs of human activities that have as their goals ever-increasing profits and non-stop, low-cost consumption. Although these films tend to focus on a specific location, they regularly make connections between the ecological damage that they focus on and other places around the world, building a sense of planetary interconnectedness. Other eco-conscious films also draw attention to the accelerated degeneration of ecosystems at the turn of the twenty-first century, but they tend to present the action in national terms even though they often set events in a context of global environmental impacts. That is the case of films such as *Children of Men* (Cuarón 2006), *The Happening* (Shyamalan 2008), *Pumzi* (Kahiu 2009), *The Road* (Hillcoat 2009), *Hell* (Fehlbaum 2011), *The Colony* (Renfroe 2013), *Autómata* (Ibáñez 2014), *The Rover* (Michôd 2014), *Young Ones* (Paltrow 2014), *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Miller 2015) and *Crumbs* (Llansó 2015), which depict extreme climate conditions and temperatures, pollution, the alteration of body functions, a lack of resources, a return to primitive life conditions and general distress. Similarly, *Wall-E* (Stanton 2008), *Pandorum* (Alvart 2009), *Avatar* (Cameron 2009), *Cargo* (Engler and Etter 2009), *Moon* (Jones 2009) and *Interstellar* (Nolan 2014) imagine alternatives to life on Earth or galactic searches for natural resources, but often fail to draw connections between their main line of action and other world locations, or between their US American protagonists and the citizens of other nations.

Although climate change appears to be the main concern of the remake of *The Day*, the alien plays a central role in the articulation of the eco-cosmopolitan discourse of the film. Applying the work of Ian Woodward and Zlatko Skrbish (2012) on cosmopolitan sociology to film studies, Celestino Deleyto suggests looking at films as “performers of cosmopolitanism” that can “activate and enact a series of cosmopolitan strategies” (2016, 98). He argues that films “may [or may not] ostensibly identify themselves

with a diversity agenda or with certain discourses of solidarity” (98). Such discourses may range from denouncing and challenging attitudes of disrespect for human rights and dignity (Fine 2012, 380), to working against the processes that lead some people to live precariously, or to helping or empathizing with Others in the context of everyday life. Drawing on Deleyto’s remarks, I read the figure of the alien in *The Day* as a potential vehicle for cosmopolitan strategies. The alien offers opportunities for interrogating the self and its social relation with Others. Darko Suvin’s theorization of SF as a genre of cognitive estrangement also hints at the cosmopolitan potential of the alien. He describes aliens as a “mirror,” comparing them to a “differing country” (1979, 5). Suvin also notes that “the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one” (5). Like cosmopolitan processes of learning and transformation, the figure of the alien may articulate a dialogue between cognition—a person or a society’s perceived reality—and estrangement—an alternative mode of being, thinking or acting. Ulrike Kuchler, Silja Maehl and Graeme Stout suggest that alien narratives are not only about how we (humans) perceive aliens or sometimes fail to do so, but also about how aliens see humans (2015, 2). Aliens do not only offer opportunities to look at the Other, but also opportunities for humans to reflect upon themselves and, more specifically, for dominant groups of people to reconsider their attitudes, actions and relationships with Others. The figure of the alien is an optimal instrument for considering cosmopolitan questions: it invites an examination of the notion of openness (or lack thereof) towards other cultures and societies; it allows characters and viewers to consider the perspectives of different societies or cultures; and the alternative civilizations that aliens represent offer viewers opportunities to assess their own (human) and the other species’ social structures and conventions. As Suvin’s words hint, the cognitive estrangement that aliens produce has the capacity to trigger the individual and societal transformation that is central to Delanty’s understanding of cosmopolitanism. For all these reasons, the remake of *The Day*—which features remarkably vocal aliens and humans—constitutes a valuable case study of cosmopolitanism in contemporary SF cinema.

Following these observations about the alien, my analysis of cosmopolitanism in *The Day* pays particular attention to the central relationship between cosmopolitanism and processes of personal and social transformation. In addition, I focus on the presentation of what Ulrich Beck calls “deformed cosmopolitanism” as a way of addressing the ecological and biological threats that both film versions present ([2004] 2006, 19–20). Regarding the first aspect, Gerard Delanty identifies personal and “societal transformation” based on learning processes as one of the defining features of cosmopolitanism (2006, 27, 41, 44). This kind of transformation derives from contact and interaction with elements of “alternative society” (39): another country, conflicting social norms, different modes of thinking and doing, or—in the case of this article—an alien civilization. Such interaction may lead to changes in habits and social structures that do not exploit or harm other people or species and that promote well-



being both within and beyond the nation. More specifically, cosmopolitan learning and transformation develop from the “interplay of Self, Other and World” (13) and require “self-reflexivity” (87) and “self-problematization” (130). Bearing in mind the centrality of alternative perspectives, learning and change to cosmopolitanism, this article considers how the remake of *The Day* both challenges viewers’ assumptions and involves characters in transformation processes mediated by socio-cultural difference and a planetary consciousness. In addition, despite the positive connotations often associated with the term, cosmopolitanism does not offer a straightforward, bump-free road towards desirable change. As already mentioned, Ulrich Beck distinguishes between deformed and non-deformed cosmopolitanism ([2004] 2006, 19). Non-deformed cosmopolitanism attempts to give form to equitable social circumstances and legal frameworks (21)—that is, a set of cosmopolitan norms which closely resemble the definition of cosmopolitanism offered at the beginning of this article. The term “deformed cosmopolitanism” refers to “really existing” social contexts in which cosmopolitan (re)actions emerge out of necessity rather than idealism (20). That is, deformed cosmopolitanism describes situations in which transnational processes and events that develop in distant places and nations influence individual human experiences and their local circumstances, driving—and sometimes forcing—people to adopt cosmopolitan approaches to transnational challenges. My analysis of the remake of *The Day* focuses on the articulation of cosmopolitan change in relation to ecological challenges, paying particular attention to uses of deformed cosmopolitanism. I first consider the role of the alien in the original film and then discuss how the new version reworks its cosmopolitan discourse.

### 3. YOU HAVE NOTHING TO FEAR: THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL*

The cosmopolitan discourse that Robert Wise’s *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) develops is an exception in the context of 1950s SF cinema, when films frequently expressed anxieties about the Cold War, the misuse of nuclear power and Soviet influence by presenting aliens as an outside menace (King and Krzywinska 2000, 4-6; Telotte 2001, 94-98; Cornea 2007, 37). In contrast, Wise’s *The Day* not only avoids presenting aliens as an invading or mind-controlling civilization but also links their visit to a reconsideration of human attitudes, world geopolitics and the use of technology. One of the main ways in which the first version of *The Day* challenges negative portraits of the alien is by misleading viewers: it hints at the aliens’ potential untrustworthiness and dangerousness (often through visual cues) but then regularly shows those suspicions to be baseless. In this paragraph, I focus on the ways in which the film presents the aliens as a potential menace and then the next paragraphs address how the film subverts such images through the behavior of the aliens. Some scenes in Wise’s film rely on the kind of *mise-en-scène* that is typical of film noir and present Klaatu (Michael Rennie) as a



potentially dangerous character. The use of high light contrasts, Klaatu's silhouette in the darkness when he arrives at the guesthouse and the shadows of fences and banister rods in the background present the alien as a menace. The repetitive, otherworldly melodies of electronic instruments, especially the theremin (Sobchack [1980] 1987, 211), also increase the sense of suspense, as in the scene in which Klaatu leaves the house to go into the spaceship, when Klaatu and Helen (Patricia Neal) are trapped in the elevator, or during the montage sequence that shows different people seeing their routines interrupted because of a worldwide power cut. Sometimes Klaatu also comes excessively close to other characters or bumps into them, as if he were threatening their safety. The employment of film noir features was common in other science fiction films of the time like *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Grant 2013, 85). Yet, the use of film noir in Wise's *The Day* is slightly different in that it subverts the meanings attached to film noir conventions and in fact reassures viewers that Klaatu and Gort (Lock Martin) are well-intentioned visitors.

Apart from providing viewers with visual cues that invite them to consider the aliens a potential menace, this version of *The Day* also draws connections with the strained character of US-Soviet relations at the time, and then reassures viewers that aliens are not dangerous. Mr. Harley (Frank Conroy), a US government official, recognizes: "our world at the moment is full of tensions and suspicions." Mrs. Barley (Frances Bavier), a woman staying at the guesthouse, also says that Klaatu comes from another place on Earth, hinting that she is referring to the Soviet Union. Even though characters show awareness and concern about the Cold War conflict, the film leaves nuclear anxieties in the background. Instead, Wise's film focuses on the attempts of Klaatu to gather world leaders and deliver a message giving humans an ultimatum to cease hostilities. As Keith Booker notes, *The Day* is an "anti-militarist" film that exposes and criticizes Cold War hysteria (2006, 37). This is established in one of the first scenes as Gort, instead of harming the humans who confront him, makes their guns and tanks disintegrate. He also tells the child Bobby (Billy Gray) that there are no wars where he comes from. In contrast to most 1950s films, the alien visitor thus appears to have noble intentions. As Peter Biskind writes, "Klaatu is surely the best behaved, most polite alien who ever hopped across hyperspace" (1983, 151). Klaatu's first words are very clear: "We have come to visit you in peace and with good will." Even when Klaatu gives humans an ultimatum, he assures that the other races that he represents do not want to take any freedom from humans—except the freedom to attack each other. He also adds that they do not care what humans do in their own planet, showing that aliens do not want to interfere with the sovereignty of Earth's nations. Klaatu only wants to prevent future nuclear threats to other planets.

Despite the generally positive image of aliens that *The Day* projects, Mark Jancovich and Derek Johnston see Klaatu and Gort as authoritarian aliens (2009, 74). At first sight, the aliens certainly appear to adopt a hegemonic position in relation to humans: Klaatu's demands are straightforward and Gort unveils his potentially

destructive power shortly after landing. Moreover, the intention of the group of races that Klaatu represents is to exterminate humanity if they do not improve their behavior. Klaatu mentions several times that he is running out of patience and that he considers taking “violent action” in order to draw the attention of the governments of Earth. Yet, throughout the film he also repeatedly states that he wants to avoid threatening humans. He in fact only makes his threat after having been among humans for a while and noting that violence “seems to be the only thing [they] understand.” Of course, in the end Klaatu does not harm anybody. Indeed, the greatest display of authority and power by the aliens consists of bringing the world to a halt in both films—and only for a half an hour. As Keith Booker suggests, *The Day* shows the aliens’ superiority to promote humility among humans (2006, 39). Wise’s film underlines Klaatu’s demanding character in order to cast humans in a powerless position, that is, in a role that they usually do not have in their relations with other species. By extension, through his demand to meet with representatives from every country, Klaatu also questions the hegemonic position of major world actors, particularly the US, the Soviet Union and the UK.

Although an alien visit to Earth can always potentially cast people from different nations as members of a united humanity when pitted against the more different extraterrestrials, Klaatu’s demands and the use of global montages highlight the idea of humans being part of a planetary community that shares its fate. In the eyes of Klaatu’s civilization, humans share a home and should manage to work together in some matters at least. From the very beginning, the alien visitor Klaatu insists that what he has to say is relevant to everyone on Earth and that he needs to speak to representatives of all countries. In addition, the film includes two montages that present Klaatu’s arrival as a planetary event. The first montage appears at the beginning of the film, as the alien saucer approaches Earth, and includes shots from India, France, the UK and the US, thus establishing the international transcendence of the events that it portrays. The second montage features places in the US, the UK, France and the Soviet Union, showing the outcome of Klaatu’s decision to leave the world without power and electricity for thirty minutes. Providing a different reading, Christine Cornea argues that *The Day* offers a US American point of view, as the US organizes humanity’s transition towards a future without nuclear weapons in the film (2007, 41). Certainly, apart from the montage sequences that show the impact of the alien arrival and reactions to it in other parts of Earth, the film is mostly set in the US. Even in the montages, shots of the US predominate. More generally, US American officials and citizens are the only interlocutors with the aliens, except in the final scene where Klaatu is finally able to address leaders from almost every nation. Still, the emphasis of the film on the global scale of the problems that it presents is indeed an aspect that differentiates Wise’s *The Day* from other science fiction films of its time, which tend to focus on outside threats to local environments, such as *The Thing from Another World* (Nyby 1951), *It Came from Outer Space* (Arnold 1953), *Them!* (Douglas 1954) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Siegel 1956).

4. *THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL* REMADE: THE INFLUENCE OF THE ORIGINAL FILM In line with the 1951 version of *The Day*, the 2008 remake also includes montage sequences that register the reactions to the alien visit in different countries. In addition, the remake introduces several details that reinforce the global scope of the message that the aliens have come to deliver. Instead of focusing on the US from the very beginning, the film opens with a scene in India in which the aliens collect human DNA so that they can adopt human form a few years later when they come to warn humans of their actions. Secondly, instead of flying saucers, the aliens use spheres to travel to Earth, the shape of the vehicles suggesting that the whole planet is at stake. Unlike in the 1951 version, the alien spheres do not only land in a major US city, Washington D.C./New York, but they appear in different countries. In addition, in the remake, a military official underlines the global range of the situation when he notes that the “mass”—a swarm of insects unleashed by Gort that devours everything in its path—goes “everywhere.” Finally, the 2008 film ends with a shot of Earth from outer space, reminding viewers that the whole planet is in danger. The films *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich 2004) and *2012* (Emmerich 2009), which also depict natural disasters in order to allude to climate change, employ this same strategy of including a shot of Earth at the end of the film, presenting the planet as a single ecosystem. The remake, then, must be contextualized within this contemporary trend to emphasize the global dimension of ecological disaster that was already present in the original film.

The 2008 version of *The Day* also draws on similar strategies to those employed in the original to generate suspicion in viewers and eventually show that Klaatu (Keanu Reeves) and Gort have little to do with fearful concerns that are common in popular imaginaries.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the remake, viewers witness the imminent impact of an object in Manhattan. In addition, later in the film a government interviewer asks Klaatu whether he is “aware of an impending attack on the planet Earth.” Through these elements, the film invites viewers to extrapolate and consider whether this is a film about 9/11—like the 2005 remake of *The War of the Worlds* (Spielberg). *The Day* also includes several references to science fiction films that reflect on the difference between humans and other beings such as aliens or cyborgs. Mirroring *Independence Day* (Emmerich 1996), the poster of *The Day* features a spaceship, or sphere, looming over New York and emitting a stream of light that appears to be about to destroy Manhattan. In addition, the scene where a government official (David Richmond-Peck) interrogates Klaatu resembles the Voight-Kampff test scene in *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982). In both films, the replicant/alien attacks the interviewer after answering a series of questions. While Derrickson’s remake visually recalls scenes from previous films that draw on invasion themes and emphasize binary distinctions, it also offers a different perspective on the relationship between human

<sup>2</sup> No actor name is provided for Gort because in the 2008 remake Gort was made through CGI and the robot does not say any word. Klaatu is the one who speaks in the name of the alien civilization.

self and non-human Other. Constantine Verevis argues that remakes alter film genres as much as they modify the source film (2006, 24, 83). In like manner, the 2008 remake of *The Day* does not only take the 1951 original as a model, it also remakes a set of genre conventions. Klaatu does not turn out to be as destructive as the aliens in *Independence Day* (Emmerich 1996) or as revengeful as the replicants in *Blade Runner* (Scott 1982). Derrickson's film reconfigures scenes from major SF films, subverts generic conventions of unc cosmopolitan distrust and revises definitions of self and Other. In this way, the film does not limit itself to offering a positive image of aliens: it rather questions the systematic casting of the Other as suspect.

Apart from questioning threatening images of aliens, the remake of *The Day* disputes human dominance as a species and casts humans in a subordinate position to other species—the league of aliens that Klaatu represents. *The Day* employs fast cutting and a shaky camera to show scientists' hypothesis about the presumed UFO impact as they fly in a plane, suggesting that humanity is clueless and vulnerable. The film emphasizes alien superiority by consistently combining low- and high-angle shots to portray the alien and humans respectively. One example is Klaatu's conversation about human behavior with Dr. Benson (Jennifer Connelly) and Professor Barnhardt (John Cleese). This scene includes high-angle shots of the humans to highlight their inferiority as they plead with the alien—who features in the low-angle shots—for an opportunity to change. Following the original film, when US armed forces attack Gort, the robot renders weapons and technology useless. In addition, in the 2008 film, the “mass” absorbs missiles and bullets, increasing its volume every time something reaches it. The 2014 eco-conscious remake of *Godzilla* (Edwards) offers a similar portrait of clueless humans who do not seem to come up with a better plan than shooting at giant and more powerful creatures with mere machine guns. As Klaatu tells Dr. Helen Benson's son, Jacob (Jaden Smith), there is nothing humans can do—apart from changing their behavior. In the remake of *The Day*, the US military keep attacking Gort until the very end of the film, suggesting that humans do not learn so easily, even when their planet is on the brink of destruction. In sum, rather than presenting authoritarian aliens, *The Day* hints that humans need to reconsider their arrogance, their reliance on armed responses to conflicts and the way that they use resources and treat nature. *The Day* questions humanity's role as a dominant species and invites viewers to reassess their identities in non-exceptional terms.

Like the original film, the 2008 remake introduces several details that reinforce the image of aliens as peaceful visitors. This version incorporates a new alien character, Mr. Wu (James Hong), who has adopted an Asian appearance and says that he loves the human species and feels at home on Earth. This character, despite being secondary, embraces Otherness and clearly shows an attitude of cosmopolitan openness. *The Day* also includes visual cues that connect with movies about friendly aliens from the 1970s and 1980s. The alien arrival scene recalls *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Spielberg 1977), as a strong source of light fills most of the screen,

projecting human and alien silhouettes against an almost-blinding background. In addition, the scientists' suits and the stretcher/capsule that soldiers use to transport Klaatu are similar to those that appear in a scene from *E.T.* (Spielberg 1982) where doctors observe E.T. and Elliot (Henry Thomas) at a field hospital. By referring to this specific scene from *E.T.*, *The Day* reminds viewers of the different perceptions of the aliens that children and most adults (especially the US government) have in Spielberg's film and its implication that most adults are prejudiced against aliens (Geraghty 2009, 70). Citing well-known films that feature harmless aliens, *The Day* reassures viewers that Klaatu and his kind are far from the destructive, machine-like extraterrestrials or the cold, mind-controlling invaders that appear in other films. *The Day* shifts attention away from the aliens' evilness and configures an alternative cosmopolitan narrative that gives viewers opportunities to consider different questions from those that invasion stories usually pose. Specifically, the film presents a series of situations that allegorically allude to the critical state of Earth's environment and the catastrophic horizon of climate change. At the same time, the film suggests that humans have much to learn from the aliens' approach to the environment.

##### 5. BETWEEN THE HORIZON OF ECOLOGICAL DISASTER AND DEFORMED COSMOPOLITANISM

The 1951 and the 2008 versions of the film differ in their representation of the motivations of the aliens to intervene on Earth. In the original, aliens do not care what is happening on Earth unless it affects their planet. They only travel to Earth because they observe an escalation towards nuclear hostility that could pose a threat to them. The remake presents a league of aliens that is concerned about human actions on Earth because it is one of the few planets that is capable of sustaining life and providing rich natural resources. Aliens come to Earth to make humans aware of the uniqueness of the planet that they inhabit and do not appreciate. In this sense, the 2008 film appears to present less self-centered and more universe-aware aliens. Yet, in the remake, aliens also delay their involvement in Earth affairs, which suggests that their cosmopolitan stance is not an ideal moral position but derives from a set of conjunctural circumstances. As seen above, they are an example of deformed cosmopolitanism in Ulrich Beck's terms ([2004] 2006, 19-20). The aliens do not rely on cosmopolitanism as a blueprint. Despite the theoretically advanced character of their civilization, aliens—like humans—only seem to have cosmopolitan concerns when threats or impacts are evident. In this way, the film suggests that cosmopolitanism primarily thrives as a response to specific situations, rather than as an outlook and way of acting that helps prevent hazards and improve lives. At least, the aliens are able to react when they see early signs of ecological impacts. Unlike humans, they do not need to witness large-scale disaster in order to recognize the need to change their way of acting.

Instead of aliens, the actual threat in both versions of *The Day* is humanity, especially in the 2008 remake. The humans in Robert Wise's film do not yet pose a threat for anyone, except for themselves and conviviality in their planet. The remake emphasizes the idea that humans are a dangerous species. When Klaatu has a conversation with the Asian alien who is considering staying on Earth until it is destroyed, Klaatu reminds him that humans are a "destructive race." For Klaatu, it is very clear that humans are killing the planet. He tells Dr. Benson: "If the Earth dies, you die. If you die, the Earth survives." Klaatu perceives humanity as a deadly virus or plague. In an article about the relationship between cosmopolitanism and climate risks, Ulrich Beck, Anders Block, David Tyfield and Joy Yueyue Zhang assert that "civilization is a wolf to civilization" (2013, 5-6). That is, the actions and consumption patterns of humans—or rather, affluent humans—put the whole of humanity (but especially those living in precarious circumstances) at risk (Harris 2010, 7-9). Klaatu's words point beyond anthropocentric notions of climate change. Humans are not just an "imagined risk community" that poses a threat to itself and shares a global fate (Beck, Block, Tyfield and Yueyue Zhang 2013, 6-9). In Klaatu's view, humans are an imagined community that constitutes a threat to the life of the planet and the rest of the life forms that it hosts. What makes humans dangerous in *The Day* is not their monstrosity or Otherness, but their stubbornness, pride and sense of exceptionalism. When the US Secretary of Defense Regina Jackson (Kathy Bates) refers to Earth as "our planet," Klaatu reproaches her that it does not belong to humans alone. Klaatu also asks the US Secretary of Defense whether she represents "the entire human race," thus exposing the hegemonic attitude of her government. By questioning humans' conception of world order, supremacy and property, Klaatu encourages viewers to participate in a cosmopolitan exercise of critical revision, reflection and potential transformation.

As in the original film, Klaatu also represents a group of alien species, but, most importantly, he represents nature: he has the power to unleash or restrain environmental impacts that metaphorically allude to climate change. The destruction that the alien causes mirrors that of nature itself in other eco-cosmopolitan SF films like *The Day After Tomorrow* (Emmerich 2004) and *2012* (Emmerich 2009). In these films, natural catastrophes and destruction voice the agony of nature in the real world. In contrast to the 1951 version of *The Day*, in which Klaatu comes to Earth to make humans negotiate and cease hostilities, in the 2008 remake, Klaatu is determined to eradicate humanity. He tells people that "the decision is made" and that "the process has begun." Klaatu's words present climate change as a process that has already started and is going to have an impact on people's lives because of previous inaction. The original film does not make any reference to the costs of humans' behavior: all people have to do is avoid an escalation of the nuclear conflict. Conversely, in the 2008 film, part of the planet is destroyed, showing that climate change has human, natural and economic costs. Some people die, the environment is severely damaged and



some buildings, factories and infrastructure are destroyed—although the film avoids pointing at the economic processes, neoliberal actors and mindless consumerism that are responsible for those impacts.

The *mise-en-scène* also presents a planet at risk. While the military run some tests on Gort at their facility, the glass windows that separate the robot from people start cracking. The cracking of the glass produced by Gort's power invites to read this effect as a visual reference to the depletion of the ozone layer around Earth, which was getting thinner and thinner until the 2000s but which now seems to be recovering three decades after the implementation of the Montreal Protocol in 1987 (Fountain 2016). In the film, however, the glass eventually breaks, the destructive "mass" escapes and everyone in the sealed room dies. Through this visual allegory, the film suggests that it is not possible to escape the impacts of climate change. Towards the end, *The Day* recovers this allegory when the front windscreen of a car starts cracking a few moments before Klaatu stops the destruction of human civilization. This time nobody dies, but, as Klaatu notes in a previous scene, stopping climate change has a price for human lifestyles: people will have to change their production and consumption patterns. Despite the film's attempts to emphasize the urgency of a change in human attitudes towards the environment, it skirts around the actual behaviors and actions that humans need to change—a neoliberal quest for the continued growth of profits; non-stop, low-cost consumption; endless resource extraction; poor waste management; energy consumption and emissions. *The Day*, then, develops an ambivalent discourse that both points at the problem of ecological exploitation and simultaneously refuses to explore the actors and activities behind it.

The remake of *The Day* presents the influence of unusual events and catastrophes, rather than cautionary political discourses, on people's awareness of cosmopolitan challenges and their interest in finding solutions for them. When humans show their surprise about Klaatu's intentions to destroy them, he explains: "I tried to reason with you. I tried to speak to your leaders." Klaatu's words reflect the difficulties of engaging in meaningful international talks to determine measures that address climate change at a global scale. In fact, political leaders are largely absent in the film. The only exception is the US Secretary of Defense. When she has a conversation with the President, viewers only listen to what the Secretary says, highlighting the President's inaction. In this way, the film shows that learning processes and transformation are not possible without practicing dialogue and a willingness to distance oneself from one's own culture (Delanty 2009, 130), except in extreme scenarios. As a matter of fact, the film suggests that cosmopolitan change can ultimately develop from a deformed sense of cosmopolitanism forced by circumstances. The idea of having aliens come to Earth (in the name of nature) to make humans react is quite an apt image, as individuals, governments and international institutions do not seem to be doing much to lower the impact of their lifestyles and economic activities on the environment. On September 21, 2014, *The Guardian* published an article with the



headline: “Climate Warning to World Leaders: Stick to 2C Limit or Face ‘Mayhem’” (Mckie 2014). While the article presents experts, campaigners and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon as the people responsible for getting the attention of global leaders and organizing a meeting in New York to address climate change, the headline itself suggests that leaders might be more willing to negotiate for a different reason: the “mayhem” on the horizon. As in *The Day*, it is the current circumstances—as we begin to witness and experience the effects of climate change—that are making some leaders acknowledge the gravity of the situation.

*The Day* resorts to the narrative strategy of depicting impending disaster to make audiences understand the severity of the problem. In this sense, the film seems to confirm Gerry Canavan’s hypothesis that, in eco-conscious SF, apocalyptic imaginaries not only provide the thrill of witnessing destruction itself, but can also show “*something [that] might intervene in time to force us to change*” (2014, 13; emphasis in the original). Towards the end of the film, a bird’s eye-view shot captures how the “mass” unleashed by Gort destroys a stadium. The camera goes around the stadium and tilts up towards the end of the shot, showing how the “mass” is heading for New York City, which appears on the horizon. Through this camera movement, the film highlights the evaporation of everything that the “mass” finds on its way and hints at potential larger-scale destruction. Ulrich Beck suggests that living through a transnational disaster event accidentally contributes to opening up avenues for cosmopolitan thinking and problem-solving. He notes that, in Oskar Maria Graf’s SF novel *The Conquest of the World* (1949), “a complete catastrophe, an existential tabula rasa, becomes the precondition for a cosmopolitan global order” ([2004] 2006, 13). Similarly, in the original version of *The Day*, people do not react until Klaatu and Gort bring the world to a halt. A more negative image of humans appears in the 2008 remake, as most people do not react until they witness destruction, and some not even then. Beck, Block, Tyfield and Zhang assert that “the perceived globality of risk” is necessary for cosmopolitan organization (2013, 6). Similarly, *The Day* suggests that humans need to see their world crumbling in order to change their behavior. As Professor Barnhardt remarks, it is “only at the precipice [that] we evolve.”

Apart from highlighting the importance of changing institutional attitudes towards the environment around the globe, the remake of *The Day* also hints that cosmopolitan challenges require individuals to revise their personal stances. As I noted earlier, Gerard Delanty argues that learning processes are central to cosmopolitanism. For him, it is necessary to interrogate the self in order to see through a cosmopolitan lens (2006, 41). The remake of *The Day* shows the development of a self-reflexive, dialogic attitude in certain characters such as Jacob, US Secretary of Defense Regina Jackson, and even Klaatu. Even though Jacob mistrusts Klaatu from the very beginning, the circumstances of the alien and the child—they need each other’s help to get from the forest to the city—lead them both to collaborate and realize that they can trust each other. Jacob’s initial distrust of Klaatu allows the film to underline the centrality

of revising personal stances to cosmopolitan thinking. Similarly, the Secretary of Defense initially deals with Klaatu and Gort in a hostile way but eventually comes to realize the futility of her government's attitude and tries to convince the President that they need to have a conversation with the aliens instead of attacking them. Even Klaatu goes from being determined to wipe humans off the face of the Earth to appreciating them as kind-hearted beings. While the ending of the 1951 version does not hint as to whether nuclear threats will cease or not, in the remake, Klaatu believes that humans are going to change, and so stops the destruction of the Earth. A few leaves whirl in the 2008 film just before Klaatu changes his mind, emphasizing that it is fall: the time when many trees drop their old leaves and get ready to grow new ones. In this way, learning and change become much more prominent in the remake. Through this metaphor, the film connects its cosmopolitan emphasis on personal and societal transformation with ecological processes. This might give the equivocal impression that characters' internal processes of change simply result from spending time with and getting to know the Other better. Yet, in the fashion of deformed cosmopolitanism, kindness does not inspire the learning processes of the characters in the remake. Rather, their conjunctural situations lead them to realize that they may fare better if they change their attitude.

## 6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the remake of *The Day* addresses contemporary cosmopolitan challenges by advocating dialogic relations between self and Other and drawing attention to the urgency and impact of climate change through its apocalyptic framing of planetary environmental awareness. The 2008 version of *The Day* intensifies the cosmopolitan message of the original film, recycling and developing some of its narrative techniques and themes and introducing new stylistic and thematic elements in order to reflect on contemporary cosmopolitan paradigms. Like the 1951 film, the remake relies on the figure of the alien to maintain the critical emphasis on human hegemony, exceptionalism, armed violence and stubbornness of the original film. Drawing on the critical, self-reflexive cosmopolitanism of Wise's film, the remake subverts generic conventions that project menacing images of Others, grants aliens the hierarchical position that (certain groups of) humans typically hold, shows humans' helplessness and emphasizes the danger that they pose to themselves, the planet and the universe. By challenging popular expectations about aliens and equipping them with nature's apocalyptic power, the remake submerges characters and viewers in learning processes and urges them to reconsider their relationship with the Other and the planet that they live in. In order to adapt to the unusual scenario that the film presents, characters need to transform their self-centered perspective into an attitude of openness towards the alien and respect for the environment. The motivation of aliens to intervene on Earth and the position taken by individuals and institutions towards the aliens' arrival

and the state of the planet imply that it is a deformed sense of cosmopolitanism that makes both people and aliens react. The apocalyptic imagination of *The Day* suggests that, as a rule, risks in themselves do not prompt a response. It is people's perception and experience of such risks that actually lead to changes in their attitudes—although the film barely points at the neoliberal, extractivist and consumerist actions that need changing. Also, while deformed cosmopolitanism can effectively draw attention to the impacts of climate change, it produces the illusory image that people can always do something last minute to stop or reverse climate change impacts. Indeed, waiting for signs of stronger environmental degradation—when there is already indisputable evidence that governments, companies and citizens need to take action—will surely lead humanity into a scenario in which it will be too late to act.

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