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Course Name:Science Fiction Film

Tutorial time: Wednesday 5-6pm

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Title: Analysis of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*

**Summary**

“*The Day the Earth Stood Still*” is a science fiction film that remakes in 2008, striking great shock to the audience when it is released to the world once again. Compared to the old version, it reveals more expressive ecological ideas. It is intended to warn humans that they will eventually destroy the earth if they continually ruin the environment and develop dangerous weapons without any positive change. The film shows at least three ecological ideas: the criticism of anthropocentrism, the criticism of modern science and technology, and the call for harmonious coexistence between human and nature.

**Key words**: “*The Day the Earth Stood Still*”; anthropocentrism; modern science; Cold War;

Klaatu is a wisdom Alien who comes from one remote planet in the galaxy. After his arrival, he begins to warn human that the destructive behaviors human have been doing for a long time will end the peace of the world. If the human does not stop these barbaric activities, they will face the end of the world. Instead of further negotiation with Klaatu, the leader of the human decides to inquest him. After escaping from the arrest, Klaatu realizes that human is a very dangerous species, not only for the earth but also for the whole universe. Subsequently, he triggers the ruin-programming to protect the earth. However, at the end, he is persuaded to stop the programming with the price of scarifying his life. Inheriting its previous version, the inside meaning of “*The Day the Earth Stood Still*” is not the story how human resist the invasion from the Alien powerful army. It is the ecological idea that human need to pay more attention to.

**the criticism of anthropocentrism**

In the 1950s, science fiction films reveal complex interplay of Cold War fears, conflicting ideologies, and political contestation[[1]](#footnote-1). Usually, the pop-up monster or Alien spaceship stands for the imaginary enemy in Cold War period. Unlike other science fiction films in the Cold War period, the first version of “*The Day the Earth Stood Still*” brings new view for people to think about the relationships among human being and between human and nature. This kind of idea is expressed deeper in 2008 version. In summary, it is a criticism of anthropocentrism. In the film, Klaatu comes to earth to warn human that the desire of human has threatened the peace of earth and even universe. Further, if the human does not stop provocations, not only the civilization on earth but also the earth itself will ruin eventually. But the Defense Minister rejects his suggestion and arrest him for further DNA research as the response, claiming that Klaatu is government property and highest secret. This beginning part description reveals the core content of anthropocentrism: human always wants to own and rule everything in the world. An ecological writer once points that it is anthropocentrism that makes human destroy nature stupidly[[2]](#footnote-2). In brief, when other science fiction films in Cold War period propagate the idea of fighting with the enemy, the director of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* tries to let people think these questions: Do we really have the right to employ the earth resource without any limitation? Is it right to satisfy people’s desire at all cost? The appearance of Klaatu shows that these answers are definitely no. Robert Torry also writes similar idea “this film exploits the shock value of this unexpected reversal of our assumption that the man is the master, the machine the servant[[3]](#footnote-3)”.

**The criticism of modern science and technology**

As Adam Roberts describes that everything can be boiled down to the genre of metaphor[[4]](#footnote-4). In this film, combined with 1950s era background, by using the metaphor, it reveals opposite view against traditional viewpoint toward technology. Traditionally, since the Renaissance, especially since the Enlightenment, technology has become an important part of civilization. With the continuation of modernization, science and technology are regarded as the elements of modern civilization and internal driving force. However, in fact, science and technology are not as perfect as people think, on one hand, it brings human convenience and enjoy, on the other hand, there are countless out-of-control consequences. And these consequences directly threaten all biological, human and earth. In the film, when one of the scientists asks Klaatu if he has some methods, such as some technologies that can solve these problems, Klaatu replies to him by saying the problem is not technology, the problem is that human is not willing to change themselves. In a word, one of the most important philosophies of this film is that science technology is a double-edged sword. On one hand, high-level technologies enable people to live a better life. On the other hand, technologies, especially the large-scale weapon, can trigger destructive consequence to human and whole earth.

**Comparison to other films in the 1950s**

Visions of the future that extrapolate contemporary trends to envision their

possible consequences have long been part of cultural and political dis-

course and debate[[5]](#footnote-5). In the 1950s, Cold War has significant influence to films, leading that there are huge similarities among science fiction films in that period, such as the cruel and aggressive image of Aliens. In The War of the Worlds, at the beginning part of the film, aliens kill the three young people who are saying that “we are friend and you are welcome”. In The Atomic Submarine, all the boats that sail near to Alien spaceship are attacked. Facing to these terrifying enemy, the only thing human world can do is stubborn resistance. This is what Samuel ·Huntington once says “For self-definition and motivation people need enemies[[6]](#footnote-6)”. However, unlike other science fiction films in the 1950s, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* use different way to narrate the story. By using metaphor, it reflects serious international political situation and call for peace for protecting human and earth.

**Conclusion**

As William Whittington says in his book, Science fiction offers an artistic and intellectual space to speculate about what could be or what might potentially influence the real world of both the present and future[[7]](#footnote-7). Although we are already far away to the Cold War era, the worry about relationship between human and nature still exists. Compared to 60 years ago, now we have more advanced technology and more sufficient methods to deal with conflicts. However, it is not uncommon that the environment still suffers damage. It is like what Klaatu says in the film, it is not about technology, it is about if human is willing to change. This philosophy behind this film is still worthy for people to think today.

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2. Corley Smith, G.T. “The House of Life – Rachel Carson at Work, by Brooks Paul. Houghton Mifflin, ” *Oryx* 11, no. 6 (1972): 482–83.

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5. Thomas B. Byers, Science Fiction Studies, Vol. 14, No. 3, Science-Fiction Film (Nov., 1987), pp. 326-339.

6. Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, 22-23

### 7. William Whittington, Sound Design & Science Fiction, 5

**Appendix**

release date: 18 December 1951

director: Robert Wise

cinematographer: Leo Tower

screenwriter: Edmund H. North

main characters-actors: Michael Rennie, Patricia Neal, Hugh Marlowe

production company: 20th Century Fox

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3. Torry, R. (1991). Apocalypse then: Benefits of the bomb in fifties science fiction films.*Cinema Journal, 31*(1), 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Roberts, Adam. 2000. *Science fiction*. London: Routledge. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Thomas B. Byers, Science Fiction Studies, Vol. 14, No. 3, Science-Fiction Film (Nov., 1987), pp. 326-339. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations, 22-23 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. William Whittington, Sound Design & Science Fiction, 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)