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The Visit

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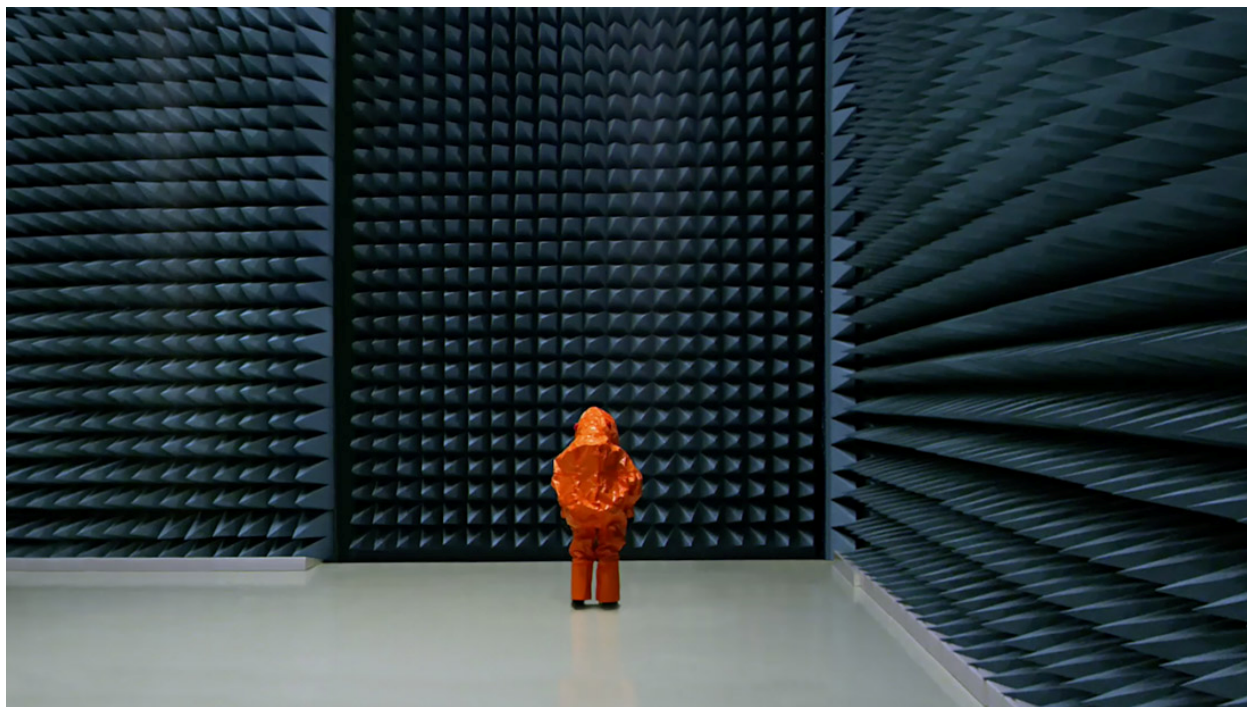
The Visit

Abstract

This is a film review of *The Visit* (2014) directed by Michael Madsen.

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



The Visit
(2015)

Directed by Michael Madsen

Danish filmmaker Michael Madsen creates a real life ‘simulation’ of how the world would react upon its first encounter with an alien species in this documentary film. *The Visit* examines a fake situation, but interviews real people, the experts who would be the first to make contact, the first to represent humankind to the alien visitors.

The viewers are placed in the position of the alien “visitor”; we see how humans in various positions of power would react to “our” visit to earth, what they would wonder about, how they would behave if they encountered “us” for the very first time.

Of interest are the people who have been chosen to represent humanity. CNES, the French Space Agency, is responsible for shaping France’s space policy but also “preparing for the future.” Jacques Arnould is a theologian and is an ethics and religious advisor to CNES, one of the first volunteers to be dispatched if aliens were to arrive on earth. Other experts include a

social psychologist and a NASA biologist. Questions that plague religion also plague the experts: “We see ourselves as moral creatures, do you see yourself that way too?”; “Do you know what is good and evil?”; “What makes you happy?”; “Humans rarely recognize our own limitations. We see ourselves as the center of the universe. How do you see us?”; “Are you a threat to us?”

The Visit makes us examine ourselves as human beings, being met for the first time by aliens who may judge us based on our prior actions on earth, actions of violence and war against each other. But at the same time these experts make us realize that aliens are humanity’s “unknown” element and we fear the unknown and tend to want to master it. Although we may have assembled a group of intelligent experts to deal with this first encounter, there is no way to know if our own actions towards the unknown may also result in violence as well. We may believe we are ready to meet these visitors, but we cannot guarantee that our fears will not cause their destruction. As one scientist explained in the documentary, all life on earth is related to the “first genesis.” Alien life, something so separate from us that we would not recognize it as life, may already exist here on earth. But our instinct is to destroy such unknown quantities. Perhaps we have already destroyed the “second genesis.” Or perhaps these aliens may know of our own inherent abilities to destroy each other, and will just remain distant from us. Not only does *The Visit* make us realize we may not be ready to handle an alien visit; perhaps they have realized we are not ready, either.